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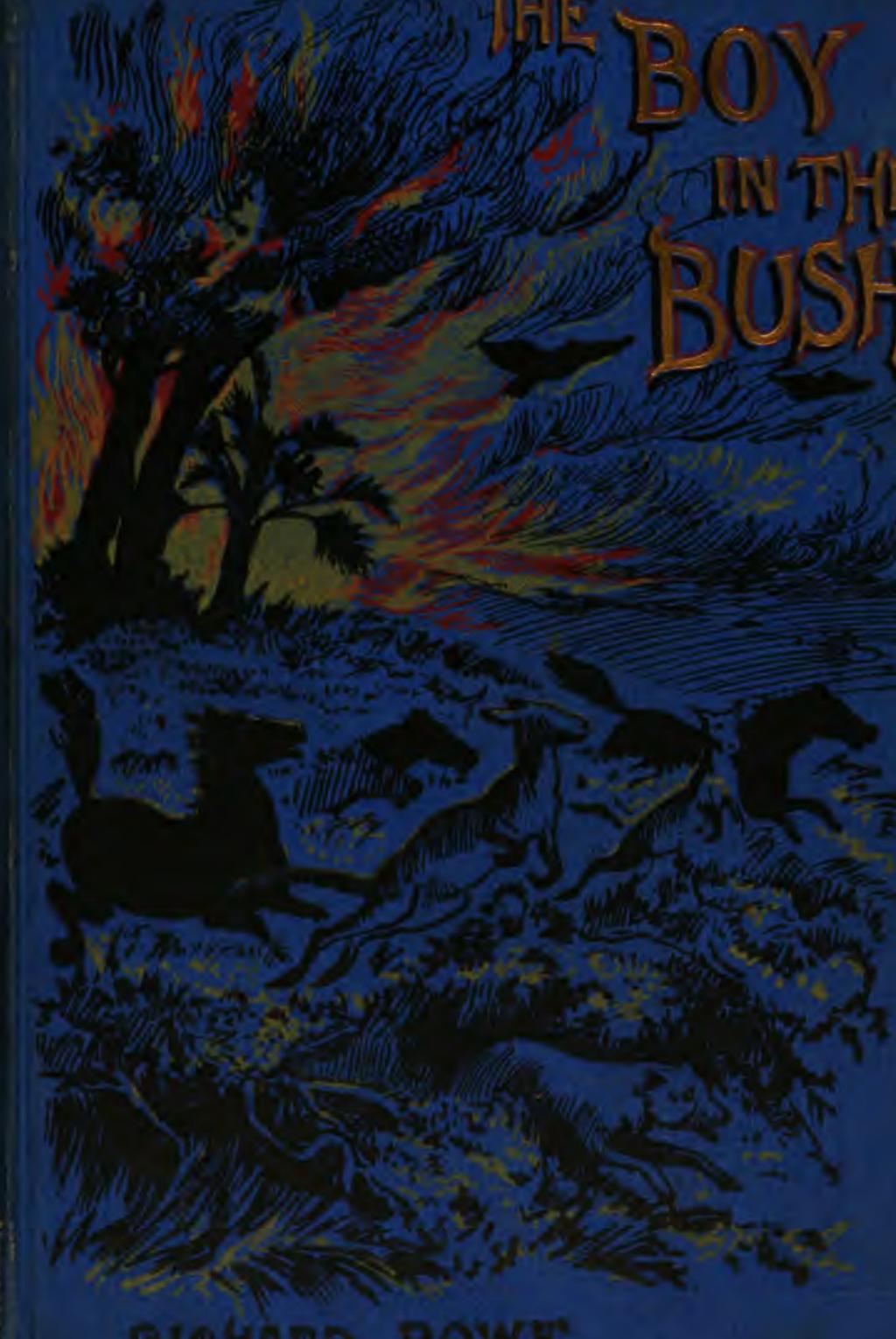
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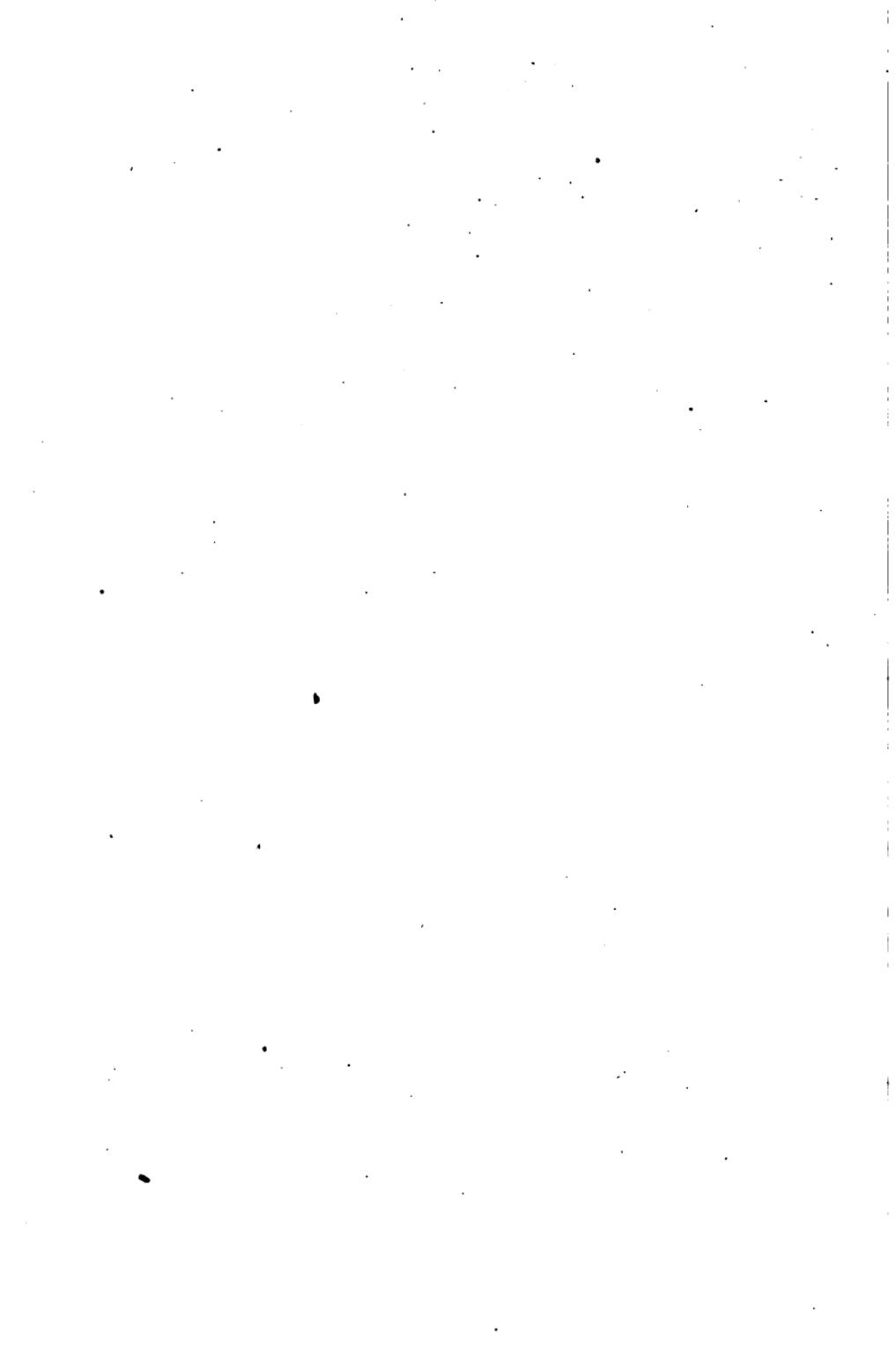
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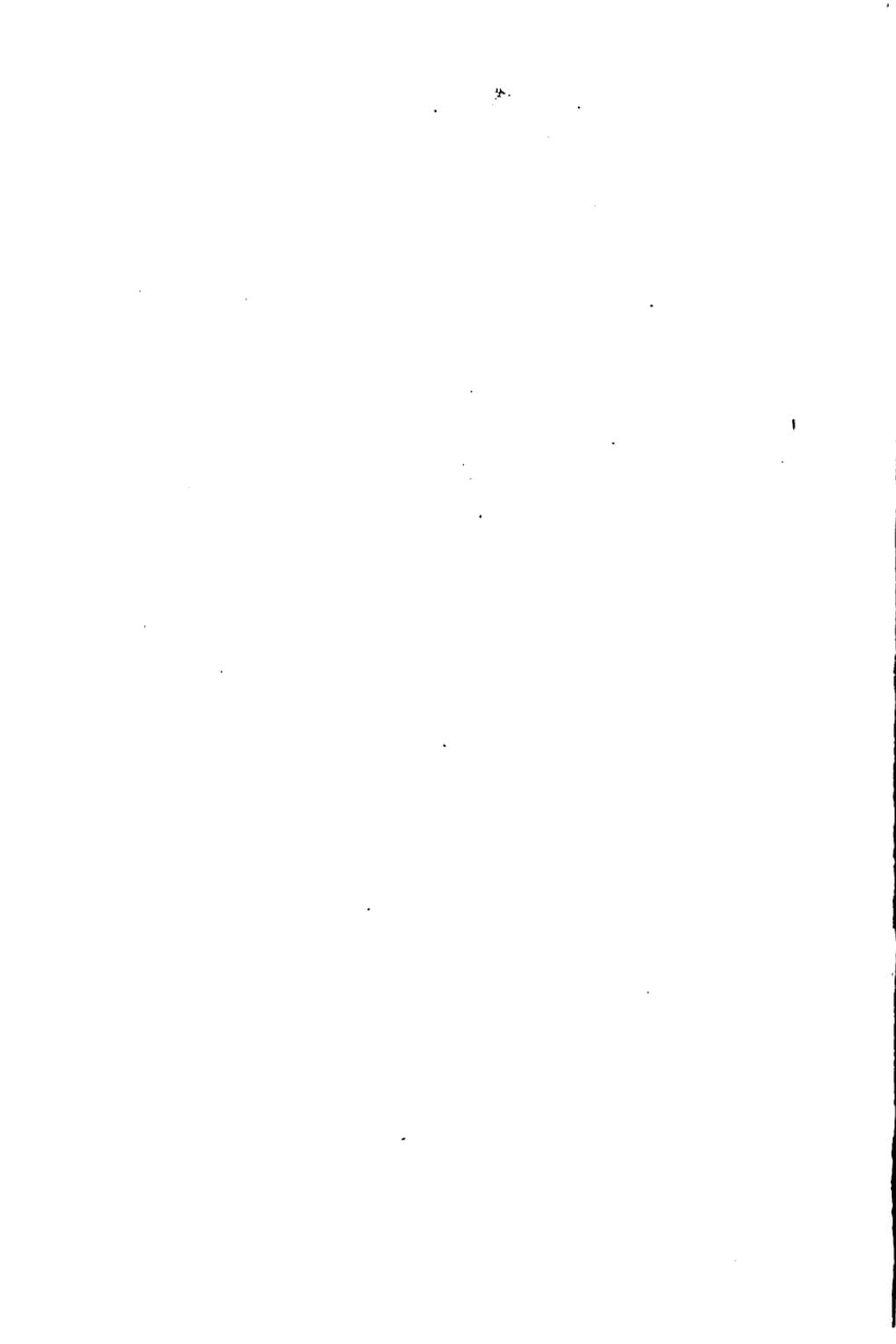
THE BOY
IN THE
BUSH

RICHARD BOWEN





THE BOY IN THE BUSH.







FRONTISPICE.—*See page 189.*

THE BOY IN THE BUSH:

A Tale of Australian Life.

By

RICHARD KIRKE,

A DOCTOR OF MEDICINE, AND A MEMBER OF THE SHIP,

"HOBSON-JONES" F.R.C.S.

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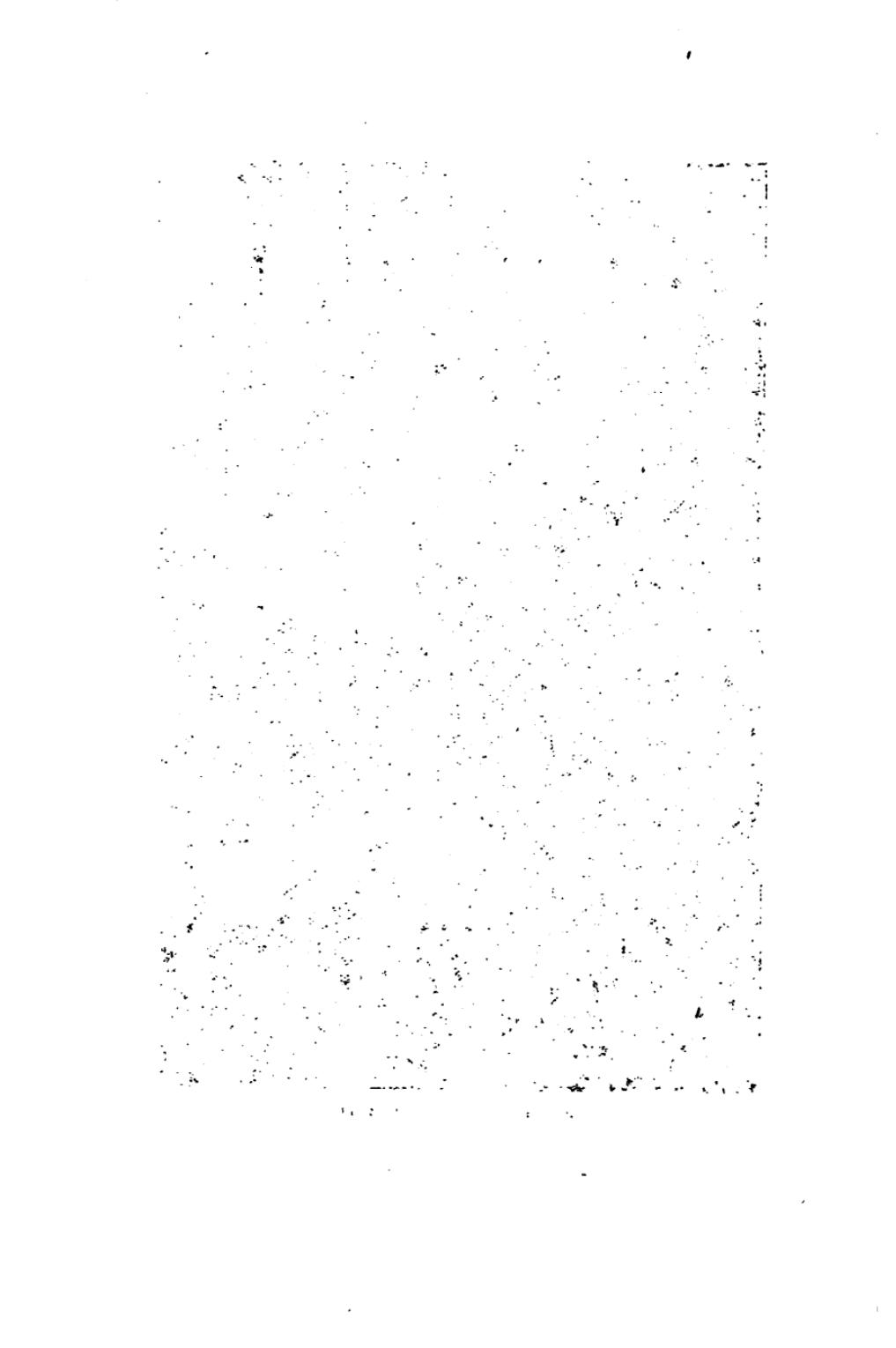
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By the late

RICHARD ROWE,

AUTHOR OF "ROUGHING IT," "THE DESERTED SHIP,"
"A HAVEN OF REST," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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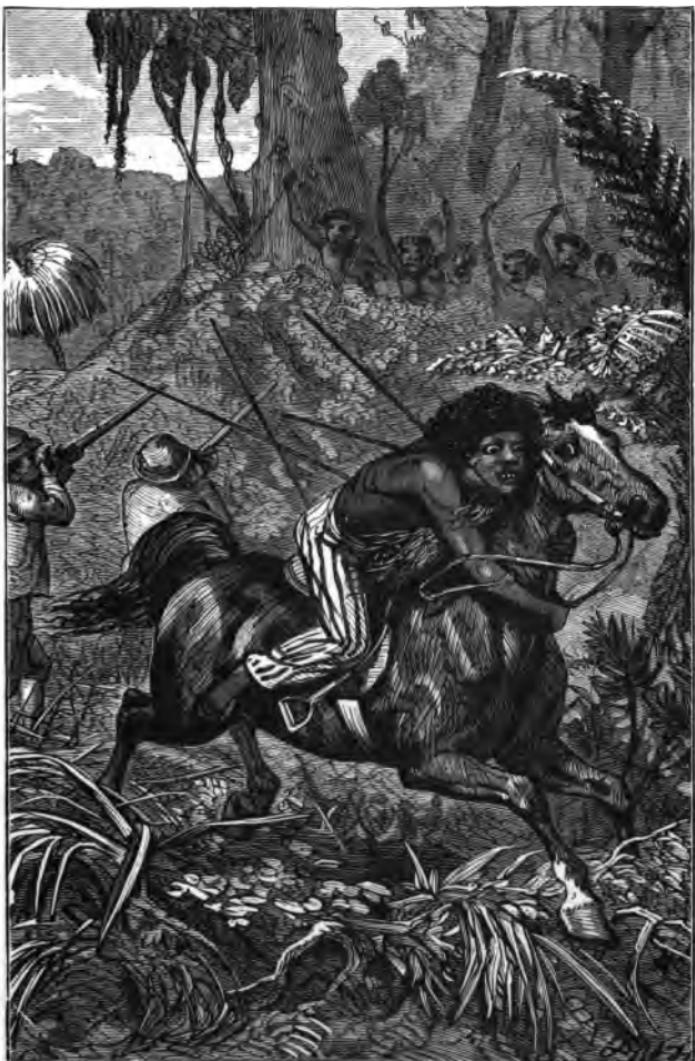
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L

VENUS AND WARRIGAL.

“THE impudent scoundrel! Just look at this, mamma. I should like to see him at it,” exclaimed Sydney Lawson in great wrath, as he handed his mother a very dirty note which a shepherd had brought home. On coarse, crumpled grocer’s paper these words were written in pencil: “Master sidney i Want your Mare the chesnit with the white starr soe You Send her to 3 Mile flat first thing Tomorrer Or i Shall Have to cum an Fetch Her.—Warrigal.”

“Sam says,” Sydney went on in rising rage, “that the fellow had the cheek to give it him just down by the slip-panels. He rode up to Sam and



FRONTISPICE.—*See page 189.*

THE BOY IN THE BUSH:

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Illustrated.

RICHARD KELLY,

AUTHOR OF "THE SALT BUSH," "THE BUSH SONG,"

"BUSH SONGS," ETC.

Illustrated by

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said that the troopers were too lazy, and some that they were too cowardly. The truth was that the troopers did not know the bush like the bushrangers, and could not help themselves, as *they* could, to fresh horses when the ones they were riding were knocked up; and, besides, the bushrangers had "bush telegraphs"—spies who let them know where it was safe to rob, and did all they could to put the troopers on false scents.

The note that Sydney had received caused a good deal of excitement at the Wonga-Wonga tea-table. Miss Smith, who helped Mrs. Lawson in the house, and taught Sydney's sisters and his brother Harry, had not long come out from London, and was in a great fright.

"Oh, pray send him the horse, Master Sydney," she cried, "or we shall all be murdered in our beds. You've got so many horses, one can't make any difference."

All the little Lawsons instantly turned on Miss Smith, though she *was* their governess.

"I thought you English people were so brave," said satirical Miss Gertrude: "you make yourselves out to be in your history-books."

But Sydney, though Miss Smith *had* talked as if Venus was just like any common horse, was very fond of Miss Smith. She was pretty, and only five years older than himself. Besides, he was acting master of the house, and a little gentleman to boot. So he said,

"Be quiet, children; you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Miss Smith isn't used to the colony.—Don't be alarmed, Miss Smith. I will see that you come to no harm."

And then he began to talk to his mother about what they had better do. Just because he was a manly little fellow, he was not ashamed to take his mother's advice.

Now Mrs. Lawson was as little disposed as Sydney to let Mr. Warrigal do as he liked. She knew that her husband would have run the risk of being "stuck up," if he had been at home,

rather than have obeyed the bushranger's orders, and that he would be very pleased if they could manage to defy the rascal. Still, it was a serious matter to provoke Messrs. Warrigal and Co. to pay the house a visit. She felt sure that Sydney would fight, and she meant to fire at the robbers herself if they came ; but would she and Sydney be able to stand against three armed men ? Not a shepherd or stockman or horsebreaker about the place was to be depended upon ; and Ki Li, the Chinaman cook, though a very good kind of fellow, would certainly go to bed in his hut if the robbers came by day, and stay in bed if the robbers came by night. John Jones, the "new chum" ploughman, whose wife was Mrs. Lawson's servant, slept in the house, and he was too honest to band with the bushrangers in any way ; "but then, he 's such a *sheep*, you know, mamma," said Sydney.

There was time to send word to the police at Jerry's Town ; but who was to go ? Any of the

men, except Ki Li and John Jones, would be as likely as not to go to Warrigal's camping-place instead of to the Jerry's Town police-barracks ; and Ki Li would be afraid to go out in the dark, and John Jones would be afraid to ride anything but one of the plough horses, and that only at an amble. It wouldn't do for Sydney to leave the place, since he was the only male effective on it ; so what was to be done ? But little Harry had heard his mother and brother talking, and, as soon as he made out their difficulty, he looked up and said,

“ Why, mamma, *I* can go. Syd, lend me your stock-whip, and let me have Guardsman.”

Neither mother nor brother had any fear about Harry's horsemanship (up-country Australian boys can ride when they are not much bigger than monkeys), but they scarcely liked to turn the little fellow out for a long ride by night. However, he knew the way well enough. Three Mile Flat didn't lie in his road, and if he didn't

fall in with any of the Warrigal gang, nobody would harm him ; and, finally, there was no one else to go to Jerry's Town who would or could go in time.

So Sydney went to the stable and slipped the bridle on Venus, and rode her down to the flat by the creek, to drive up Guardsman. And then he put the saddle and bridle on Guardsman and brought him round to the garden-gate, where Harry stood flicking about Sydney's stock-whip very impatiently, whilst his mamma kissed him and tied a comforter round his neck. Sydney gave Harry a leg up, and cantered with him to the slip-panels, to take them down for him.

As soon as he was through, Harry shouted "Good night," and gave Guardsman his head, and was off like a little wild boy. After one or two failures, that made his face tingle, he managed to crack Sydney's stock-whip almost as cleverly as Sydney could have done. It rang through the still moonlight bush, and when

Sydney lost sight of him, Harry, tired of the monotony of flat riding, was steering Guardsman stem on for a grey log that glistened like frosted silver in the moonshine.

When Sydney had stabled Venus again, and—an unusual precaution—turned the key in the rusty padlock, and when he had given a look about the outbuildings, it was time for him to go in to supper and family prayers. He read the chapter, and Mrs. Lawson read the prayers. She was a brave woman, but, with her little girls about her, and her little boy away, she couldn't keep her voice from trembling a little when she said, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night."

Then the girls kissed their mother and their brother, and said "Good night;" and Miss Smith kissed Mrs. Lawson, and said "Good night," and said "Good night" to Sydney without kissing him (though he looked as if he would have liked her

to); and John Jones and his wife said "Good night, ma'am," "Good night, sir," just as if Sydney had been a grown-up master, and went to bed to snore like pigs, though they *were* dreadfully afraid of bushrangers. Sydney went into his mother's bed-room, and looked at the blunderbuss that stood by the bed-head (Mrs. Lawson had selected the blunderbuss as her weapon, because she thought she "must be sure to hit with that big thing"), and he showed her once more how to pull the trigger. Then he bade her "Good night," and went through the house, snacking the windows and fastening the shutters, though that was as unusual at Wonga-Wonga as locking the stable-door. And then he went along the verandah to his own little room at one end, where he locked himself in, and drew the charge of his gun and loaded it again, and looked at the chambers of his revolver, and put the caps on, and laid it down on a chair ready to his hand. When his preparations

were completed, he said his prayers, and tumbled into bed with his clothes on, and slept like a top.

Harry wasn't expected home until next day. He had been told to sleep at the "Macquarie Arms," in Jerry's Town, when he had left his message at the barracks, and come home at his leisure in the morning. About four miles from Wonga-Wonga, the dreariest part of the road to Jerry's Town—begins a two miles' stretch of dismal scrub. Harry put his heels into Guardsman's sides to make him go even faster than he was going when they went into the scrub, and was pleased to hear a horse's hoofs coming towards him from the other end. He thought it was a neighbour riding home to the next station; but it was Warrigal. As soon as Harry pulled up Guardsman to chat for a minute, Warrigal laid hold of the bridle and pulled Harry on to the saddle before him.

"Let's see, you're one of the Wonga-Wonga kids, ain't you?" said the robber. "And where

are you off to at this time of night? Oh! oh! to fetch the traps, I guess; but I'll stop that little game."

Just then Harry gave a *coo-ey!* He couldn't give a very loud one, for he was lying like a sack on the robber's horse; but it made Warrigal very savage. He put the cold muzzle of a pistol against Harry's face, and said,

"You screech again, youngster, and you won't do it no more."

And then Warrigal took Harry and the horses into the scrub, and gagged Harry with a bit of iron he took out of his pocket, and bailed him up to a crooked old honeysuckle tree, with a long piece of rope he carried in his saddle-bags.

"Don't frighten yourself; I'll tell your Mar where you are, and you'll be back by breakfast," said Warrigal, as he got on Guardsman, driving his own tired horse before him.

It wasn't pleasant for a little boy to be tied tight to an ugly old tree in that lonely place,

and to hear the curlews wailing just as the bush-rangers call to one another, and the laughing jackasses hooting before daylight, as if they were making fun of him. But what vexed brave little Harry most was that he hadn't been able to get to the police.

Next morning, just as day was breaking, Warrigal and his two mates, with crape masks on, rode up to Wonga-Wonga. I don't know which were the bigger cowards, those three great fellows going to bully a lady and a boy, or the half-dozen and more of great fellows about the place who they knew would let them do it. They made as little noise as they could, but the dogs began to bark, and woke Sydney. When he woke, however, Warrigal had got his little window open, and was covering him with his pistol. Sydney put out his hand for his revolver, and though Warrigal shouted, "Throw up your hands, boy, or I'll shoot you through the head," he jumped out of bed and fired. He missed Warrigal,

and Warrigal missed him, but Warrigal's bullet knocked Sydney's revolver out of his hand, and one of Warrigal's mates made a butt at the bedroom door and smashed it, and he and Warrigal (were they not heroes?) rushed into the room, and threw Sydney down on the bed, and pinioned his arms with a sheet. The other bushranger was watching the horses. By this time the whole station was aroused. The men peeped out of their huts, half frightened and half amused; not one of them came near the house. John Jones and his wife piled their boxes against their room-door, and then crept under the bed. Miss Smith went into hysterics, and Gertrude and her sisters couldn't help looking as white as their night-dresses, though they tried hard to show Miss Smith how much braver native girls were than English, even if they did not know so much French, and Use of the Globes, and Mangnall's Questions. Mrs. Lawson had fired off her blunderbuss, but it had only broken two panes of

the parlour-window, and riddled the verandah-posts; so Wonga-Wonga was at the bushrangers' mercy.

They ransacked the house, and took possession of any little plate and jewellery and other portable property they could find. When the robbers had packed up what they called the "swag," and put it on one of their horses, they pulled Ki Li out of bed, and made him light a fire, and cook some chops, and boil some tea. (In the Australian bush the hot water isn't poured on the tea, but the leaves are boiled in the pot.) Then they marched Mrs. Lawson, and Miss Smith, and Sydney, and his sisters, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and Ki Li, into the keeping-room, and sat down to breakfast, with pistols in their belts, and pistols laid, like knives and forks, on the table. The bushrangers tried to be funny, and pressed Mrs. Lawson and the other ladies to make themselves at home and take a good meal. One of the robbers was going to kiss

Miss Smith, but Sydney, pinioned as he was, ran at him, and butted him like a ram. He was going to strike Sydney, but Gertrude ran between them, calling out, "Oh, you great coward!" and Warrigal felt ashamed, and told the man to sit down.

"We call him Politeful Bill," Warrigal remarked in apology; "but he ain't much used to ladies' serciety."

When breakfast was over, Warrigal asked Sydney where the mare was.

"Find her yourself," said Sydney.

"Well, there won't be much trouble about that," answered Warrigal. "She's in the stable, I know, and you've locked her in, for I tried the door. I suppose you're too game to give up the key, my young fighting-cock? You're game and no mistake, Master Cornstalk, and I'm a native, too."

"More shame for you," said Sydney.

"That be blowed," went on Warrigal; "and

since you're so sarcy, Master Sydney, you shall come and see me take your mare. You might as well ha' sent her instead of sending for the traps, and then I shouldn't ha' got the bay horse too"—and he pointed to Guardsman hung up on the verandah.

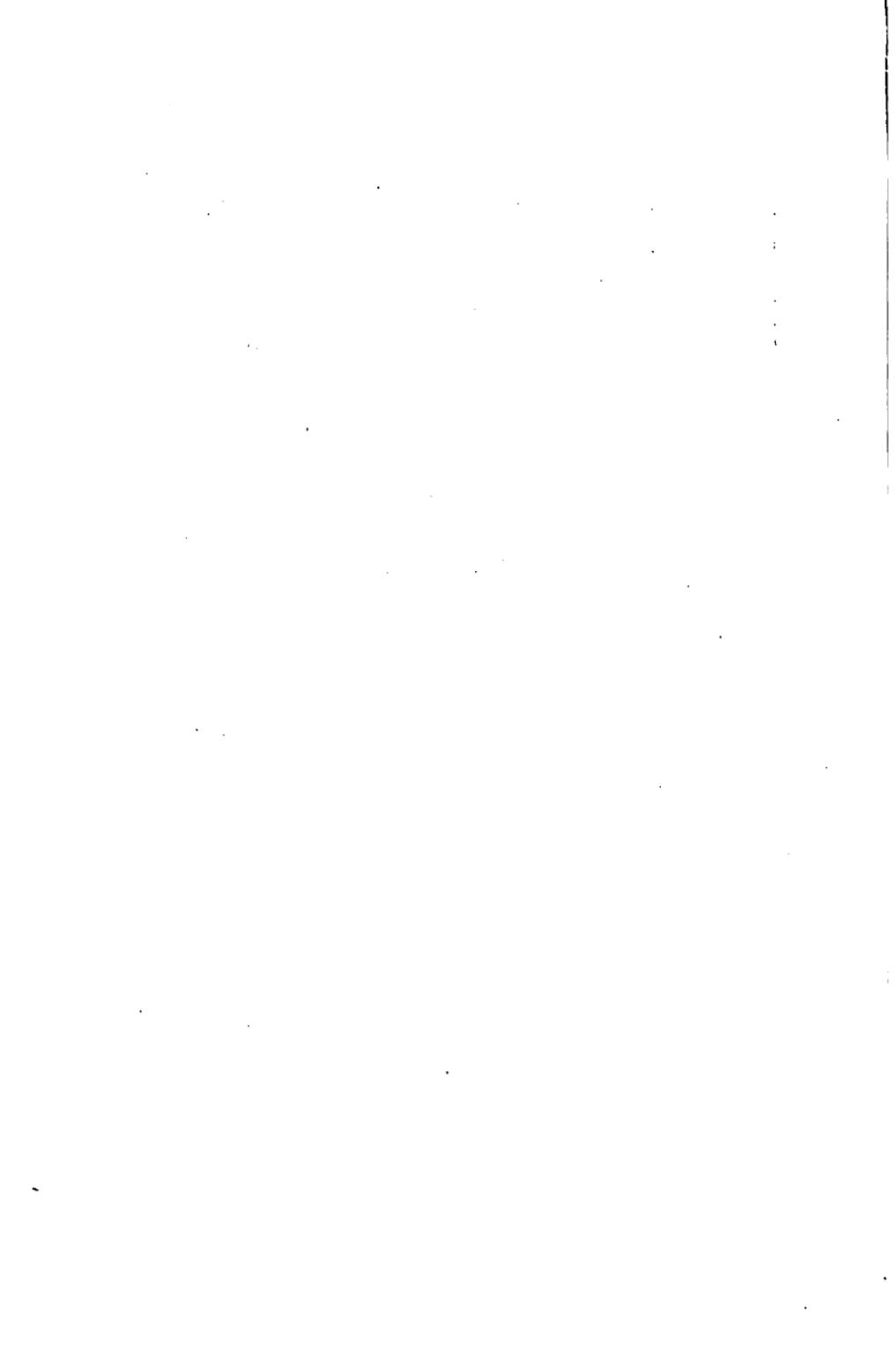
There was no time to ask what had become of Harry. Warrigal hurried Sydney by the collar to the stable, whilst the other men mounted their horses, and unhooked Guardsman to be ready for their captain. Warrigal blew off the padlock with his pistol, but Venus was fractious, and wouldn't let him put on her halter. Whilst he was dodging about in the stable with her, Sydney heard hoofs in the distance. Nearer and nearer came the *tan-ta-ta-tar-ta-ta-tan-ta-ta*. Four bluecoats galloped up to the slip-panels—three troopers and a sergeant; the sergeant with Harry on his saddlebow. In a second Harry was down, and in three seconds the slip-panels were down too. Up the rocky rise came the troopers as if they

were riding a steeple-chase. The waiting bush-rangers saw the morning sun gleaming on their carbines as the police dashed between the aloes and the prickly pears, and, letting Guardsman go, were off like a shot. Sydney banged to the stable-door, and, setting his back against it, shouted for help. His mother and Gertrude, and even John Jones, as the police were close at hand, rushed to his aid ; and up galloped the troopers. Instead of bagging Venus, Warrigal was bagged himself. He fired a bullet or two through the door, and talked very big about not being taken alive ; but he thought better of it, and in an hour's time he was jogging off to Jerry's Town with handcuffs on and his legs tied under his horse's belly.

If Warrigal had not bailed up little Harry, most likely he would not have been taken ; for when Harry had got to Jerry's Town, he would have found all the troopers away except one. In the scrub, however, Harry heard the sergeant and



"WARRIGAL WAS BAGGED HIMSELF." — Page 18



his men returning from a wild-goose chase they had been sent on by the bush telegraphs, and managing at last to spit the gag out of his mouth, he had given a great *co-no-no-no-no-no-ey!*

After that night Miss Smith always called Sydney *Mr. Sydney*, and Sydney let Harry ride Venus as often as he liked.

II.

UP A SUNNY CREEK.

SOON after his adventures with Warrigal, Harry Lawson had a tutor to teach him instead of Miss Smith, and when Harry was twelve, his cousin, Donald M'Intyre, who was about his own age, came to live at Wonga-Wonga to share the tutor's instructions. Harry considered this a very jolly arrangement. Like most Australian boys, he was a very quick little fellow, but he was inclined to be rather lazy over his lessons ; and Donald helped him in his Latin and French exercises, and made his sums come right for him, and yet was just as ready for a spree out of school as Harry was. Donald, too, had been born

in the colony, and so the two boys got on famously together.

One Christmas the tutor had gone down to spend his holidays in Sydney, and Harry and Donald could do just as they liked. The papers were full of some traces of Leichhardt, the brave Australian explorer, that had recently been discovered, and the boys, of course, had read "Robinson Crusoe" also; and so they resolved to set out on a secret exploring expedition. They determined to go by water, because that would be both more like Robinson Crusoe, and more of a change for them. They were very fond of riding, but still they were as used to riding as English boys are to playing at "foot it," and they had been only once or twice in the "cot" which a North of Ireland man, who had come to the station as a bush carpenter, had finished the week before, that the station people might be able to cross the creek in time of flood, when no horse could swim it or ford it.

One broiling December day—there is no frost or snow, you know, in Australia at Christmas-time—Harry and Donald slipped down to the cot directly after breakfast. They had a gun with them, and caps, and powder, and shot, and colonial matches in brown paper boxes, and some tea, and sugar, and flour, and three parts of a huge damper (that's a great flat round cake of bread without any yeast in it), and a box of sardines and a can of preserved salmon, that Sydney had given them out of the store, and some salt, and two pannikins, and a Jack Shea (that's a great pot) to boil their tea in, and a blanket to cover them by night, and to hoist now and then as a sail by day. The cot had no mast, but they meant to use one of the oars for that, and they had cut a tea-tree pole to serve for a yard.

They were going up the creek, not down. They knew that the creek ran into the Kakađua at Jerry's Town that way, and, of course, as ex-

plorers, they wanted to go where they had not been before. So they shipped their stores, and untied the painter—it was twisted round an old gum tree on the creek-side—and pushed off from the bank, and began to try to pull up stream. But they could not row nearly so well as they could ride, and at first they made the cot spin round like a cockchafer on a pin. They were sharp little fellows, however, and soon got under way, only catching crabs when they tried to feather.

By the time they got abreast of Three-Mile Flat, though, their arms ached; and Harry stopped pulling, as he made out, to tell Donald again about Warrigal, and Donald stopped pulling, as *he* made out, to listen to Harry, although he knew the story by heart. Then they gave a spurt, and then they stopped pulling again, and hoisted their blanket on one oar, and tried to steer with the other; but it was a long time before they could manage this properly. The

sail was for ever flapping against the mast—taken aback, as the sailors say—or else the cot was poking her nose into the tea-tree scrub on one side of the creek or the other, as if she wanted to get out of the hot sunlight into the moist shade. Still, it would have been very pleasant, if there had not been quite so many mosquitoes ; but they hummed over the water in restless clouds like fountain-spray. However there were native vines, with grapes like yellow currants, twining round the lanky tea trees and lacing them together ; and the bell-birds kept on dropping down into the scrub, and flying up into the gum trees, and calling *ting-ting, ting-ting*. It sounded like a dinner-bell, and the boys determined to take an early dinner. They ate up almost all their damper, and all their sardines, and picked their dessert off the wild vines.

On they went again ; but they had not gone far before they came to what is called in Australia a “chain of ponds.” The creek had partly dried

up, and they had to pull and push the cot from one pond to another. This was hard work, and not very pleasant work either, for the sand-flies got into the corners of their eyes as if they wanted to give them the blight, and the leeches crawled up their trousers and turned their white socks red with blood. Their heads throbbed so that they could hardly bear to hear the locusts—thousands of them—clattering on the trees like iron-shipwrights hammering, and they felt quite angry when the long-tailed, brown coach-whip bird flew by, making a noise just like a slavedriver cracking his lash. At last, however, they got into clear water again—clear except for the grey snags and sawyers—and paddled lazily along ; listening to the twittering wood-swallows as they dipped their blue wings into the water, and the great, black, sharp-winged swifts screaming for joy as they tacked high overhead. Harry and Donald could not help wishing that the cot (which they had christened the *Endeavour*, in honour of Cap-

tain Cook) would dart along of herself like the swifts. It had taken such a time to get her through the chain of ponds, that evening was coming on. Great flocks of cockatoos were circling round their roosting-trees like English rooks, and parrots and lories—their fine green, and red, and blue, and yellow feathers beginning to look very dull and ragged, because moulting-time was near—were taking their evening bath in the shallow water by the banks, splashing it over their heads and wings, and chattering as if they were saying, “Isn’t this prime fun?” Presently the cockatoos lighted on the dark trees, and made them look as if a hundred or two of ladies’ pocket-handkerchiefs had been hung out to dry on them, and then the boys thought it was time to find a roosting-place themselves. They pushed the cot into a little bay in the bank, and fastened her to an old black stump, and then they scooped a hole in the ground for a fireplace, and gathered sticks, and lighted a fire. But when they were going to cook their

supper, they found that they had lost their flour, and that their sugar-bag had got so wet that there was only a little sweet mud left in it. But that did not matter nearly so much as the loss of the flour. They boiled their tea, and sweetened it with the mud, and after a good deal of trouble they got the salmon-tin open. Harry, who was very hungry, was for finishing the salmon and what was left of the damper; but Donald said,

“No; we must go on allowance now—we’ll keep half for to-morrow’s breakfast, because, perhaps, we shan’t be able to shoot anything to-night—that’s how explorers manage.”

When supper was over, the moon had risen, and the boys went down with their gun to the creek to see if they could shoot a duck. The dark water was plated in patches with ribbed and circling silver, and, just in the middle of one of the patches, up came a black something like a bottle.

“Hush! it’s a water-mole,” whispered Harry;

but before he could point his gun at it the queer duck-billed thing had gone under again. The boys found no ducks, and did not go very far to look for them. They were tired, and had had their supper, and were sure of a breakfast. So they soon went back to their fire, piled more sticks on it, and then, snuggling under their blanket, fell asleep. They said their prayers before they fell asleep beneath the bright moon and stars, and, as they said them, they thought for the first time that they had not done quite right in leaving Wonga-Wonga without letting any one there know that they were going.

When they woke in the morning, the sun was up, and the glossy magpies were hopping about the logs, and everything looked cheerful. The boys took a dip in the creek, and boiled their tea, and had their breakfast, and then away they went again in high spirits, although now they had no food except what they might shoot or catch. The kingfishers in their blue coats and

yellow waistcoats were darting backwards and forwards over the water, and the fussy little sedge-warblers were dodging about the reeds, and twittering a little bit of every bird's song they could think of; but they weren't worth powder and shot. By noon—they could tell the time pretty well by the sun—both Harry and Donald felt very hungry, for they had had a very early breakfast. They began to wish that they had saved some of the salmon for their dinner; but just then the *Endeavour* was gliding between banks that had no tree or scrub, but only tufts of dry coarse grass on them, and Donald saw a bandicoot run out of one of the tufts. Up went the gun to his shoulder, and in a second Mr. Bandicoot had rolled over dead upon his back. A bandicoot is a very big brown kind of rat—nicer to eat than any rabbit. The boys soon made a fire, and baked the bandicoot in the ashes, in his skin; and they relished him ten times more than the preserved salmon. Rat, and

tea without sugar or milk, may not seem a very inviting bill of fare, but you know the Delectus says that hunger is the best sauce, and, besides, baked bandicoot anybody might like.

Harry and Donald had some more shooting that day. About a mile from the place where they had taken their dinner they found a break in the creek-bank, filled up with tall rusty bulrushes. They got out of the cot, and pushed their way through the rushes, looking out very carefully for snakes, and sometimes sinking into the slush below the baked upper earth, just as if their feet had gone through a pie-crust, and on the other side they found a lagoon full of water-fowl. Then they forced the *Endeavour* through the rushes—she made a great black steaming furrow in the yellow ground—and launched her down the dry border of the lagoon, and pulled about in her, popping away in turns, and fancying themselves in Fairy Land. There were two or three black swans cruising proudly backwards and forwards,

and fleets of piebald geese, and grey geese, and sooty ducks, and silvery ducks, and chestnut ducks with emerald necks, and musk ducks with double chins, and all their bodies under water. It was very funny to see their heads and necks moving about, as if they had lost their bodies and were looking for them. There were coots, too, on the banks of the lagoon, and purple herons and white herons holding up one leg as if they were trying how long they could do it for a wager; and ibises with untidy tufts of feathers on their breasts, that looked like costermongers' dirty cravats dangling out of their waistcoats, and native companions, great light blue cranes lifting their long legs out of the mud, and trumpeting "Look out!" to one another, when the *Endeavour* was coming their way. There were beautiful water-lilies on the lagoon, also, with broad round leaves like shields of malachite, and great blossoms of alabaster, and blue and rose-coloured china. The boys, however, were too

busy with the water-fowl to look at the water-flowers. They kept on popping away until the moon had been up for some time, and the bitterns were booming in the swamps all round, and the nankeen cranes were stalking about, nodding their white crest-plumes like Life Guardsmen, and croaking, "Now we'll make a night of it."

When Harry and Donald left off shooting, they found that they had fired away all their powder and shot except two charges, and that they had got three little ducks. They made a very merry supper off one, baking it on the lagoon bank, as they had baked the bandicoot, and then they went to sleep by their fire. Early in the morning, just as the laughing jackass was hooting before daybreak, Donald woke. The moon had gone down, and so had the fire, and Donald, though it was summer, felt very chilly.

He got up to stamp his feet and stir up the fire. What do you think he saw? An iguana—that's a great lean lizard—sneaking off with the

two ducks that were to serve for breakfast and dinner. Donald flung a hot log at him, but it only made the lizard run the faster. Plenty of red sparks were scattered about, but the two ducklings were not dropped.

“Hech, weel,” said Donald (he had picked up a little Scotch from his father). “it’s nae guid greetin’ ower spilt milk;” and he lay down again and slept like a top, until Harry woke him, asking him what ever could have become of the ducks? They had to breakfast on tea alone that morning. They tried to shoot a duck, but they had made the birds wild, and they were very anxious not to waste their precious powder, and so they did not succeed.

When they had hauled the cot into the creek again, they were half inclined to go back to Wonga-Wonga, but they determined to go on for one day more.

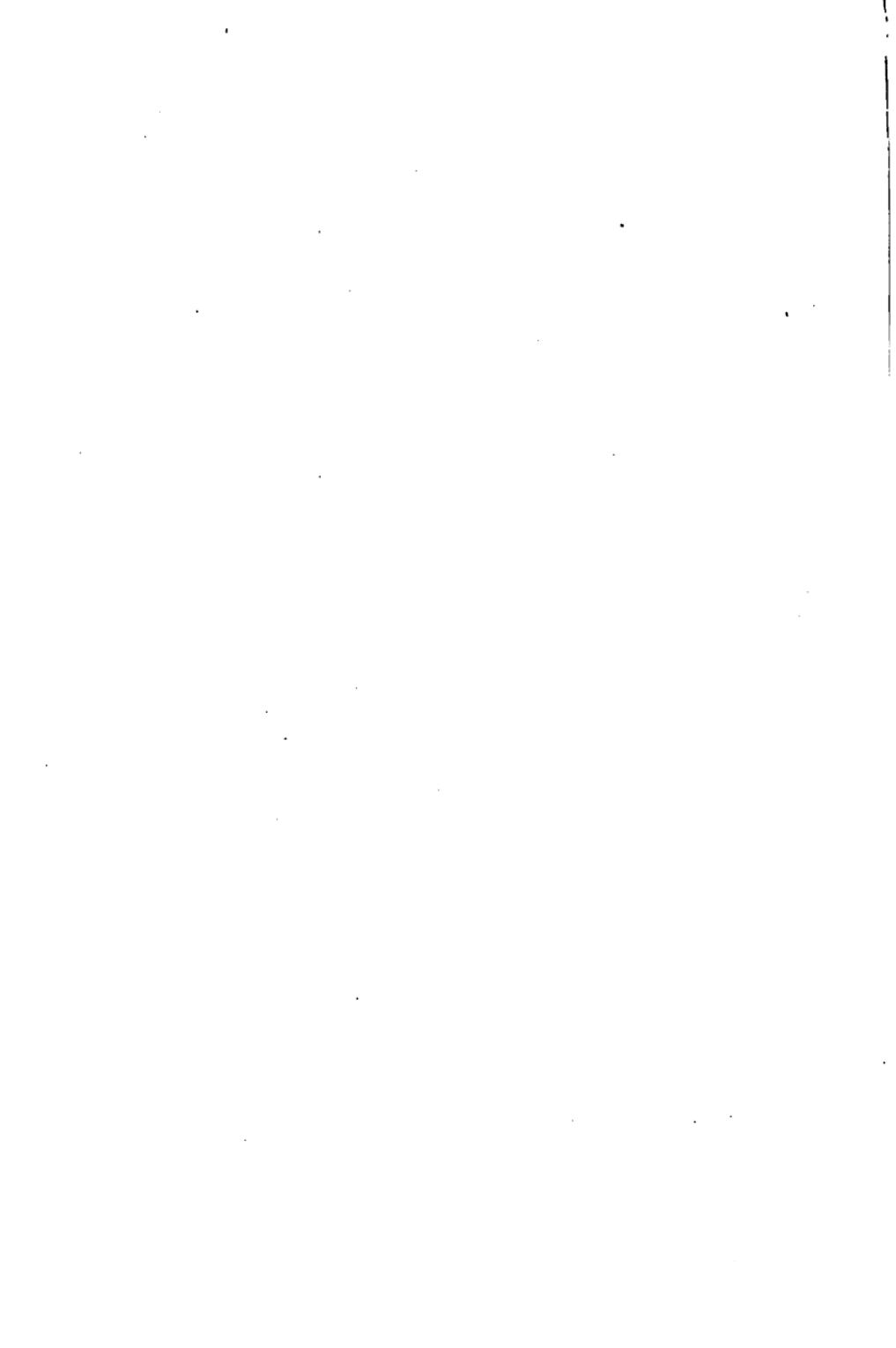
They looked about eagerly for something to shoot, but everything except insects seemed to

have vanished from the creek. On both sides there were stony ridges with scarcely a blade of grass on them. One landrail ran along the bank, calling out "ship, ship," as if it was hailing the *Endeavour*, but Donald missed it when he fired at it. Harry took the gun then, and said he would try to shoot a fish. He saw something black wriggling about in the water, which he thought was an eel, and he fired and hit it; but it was a snake, and it bit itself before it died; so they were obliged to leave it in the water, instead of cooking it on shore and getting a dinner as white and delicate as a roast chicken.

Still, however, the boys determined not to turn back until next day; and late in the afternoon they got more fish than they could eat. They came upon a black fellow's "fish-trap"—a kind of little mud hut, thatched with dry grass—and out of it they scooped up a score or two of black fish, and what they call trout in Australia. They were not very tasty, but the boys enjoyed



"THE BLACK FELLOWS WERE IN A VERY SAVAGE MOOD." - *Page 35.*



the little fellows greatly when they had grilled them, though they had no soy.

When they had finished their dinner, they rowed on to find the black fellows' camp, which they knew could not be very far off. The moon had come up again, however, before they reached it. The creek, fringed with shea-oaks with dark long leaves like lanky tassels, wriggled about there like a snake. Long before the boys got to the camp, they heard the measured tramp of feet and fierce shouts, and when they got there they saw ever so many black fellows, streaked with ochre, dancing and brandishing their boomerangs and waddies, whilst the "gins" (that's the women) in their 'possum cloaks and blankets, squatted on the ground beating time. Harry and Donald were not a bit afraid of black fellows. They were generally very friendly in those parts, and often came to Wonga-Wonga. But it happened that the black fellows were in a very savage mood. They had been doing a little

sheep-stealing, and an overseer had fired at them, and killed one of them ; and so they had made up their minds to kill the first white fellow they came across, in revenge. As soon as they saw the cot, they rushed down to the creek, shouting out, "Wah! wah! wah!" and they pulled the boys on shore, and burnt the cot on the great fire they had lighted to keep the "debil debil" away. Then they jabbered for a long time, disputing which of the boys they should kill ; and Harry and Donald, brave little fellows though they were, most heartily wished themselves back at Wonga-Wonga.

All of a sudden, however, a black fellow held up his finger, and then a dozen of them put their ears to the ground. It was horses' hoofs they heard in the distance. Then they jabbered again, and all the blacks ran into the scrub, leaving the boys, but carrying off their gun. In a few minutes up galloped Mr. Lawson, and Sydney, and a stockman. The boys had been hunted far and

wide, but it was only that day that the cot had been missed, and so a clue found to their whereabouts. Mr. Lawson, having heard that the up-creek blacks were "in a scot," and fearing that the youngsters might fall into their hands, had then started with his little party in pursuit. Of course, he could not help feeling very angry with the young truants, but there was no time to tell them so then. Boomerangs and spears began to whiz out of the scrub, and there was no good in three men stopping to fight with a hundred whom they could not see. So Mr. Lawson pulled Donald on to his horse, and the stockman pulled Harry, and off they galloped; whilst Sydney brought up the rear, firing his revolver right and left into the scrub as he rode away.

III.

THE CAVE OF THE RED HAND.

HARRY and Donald were not frightened out of their love for exploring by their adventure up the creek. The next expedition they went on, however, was by land. They had heard a good deal of the Cave of the Red Hand in the Bulla Bulla Mountains, about ten miles from Wonga-Wonga ; and one Saturday afternoon, directly after dinner, they started in search of the cave—Harry on his own horse Cornstalk, and Donald on his own mare Flora M'Ivor. They knew that they had to steer for a very tall blasted gum tree that stood on the top of a ridge, and that when they had “rose the ridge,”

as Australians say, they would find the mouth of the cave somewhere near at hand on the other side of the gully.

When they got down into the gully they dismounted, and hobbled their horses where there was a little feed ; and then they began to look about them. It was some time before they found the cave's mouth, but, whilst they were looking for it, they saw what neither of them had ever seen alive before, though they were Australian-born ; and that was one of the shy birds after which the mountains were named. They got a full view of the dingy cock-pheasant, as he stood between two clumps of scrub, with his beautiful tail up like a lyre without strings. "Bulla, bulla, bulla, bulla," he was gurgling like a brook ; but, as soon as he saw the boys, he was off like a shot.

"Here it is!" at last shouted Harry, and when Donald ran up, he found his cousin standing outside a very gloomy-looking opening in the hill-

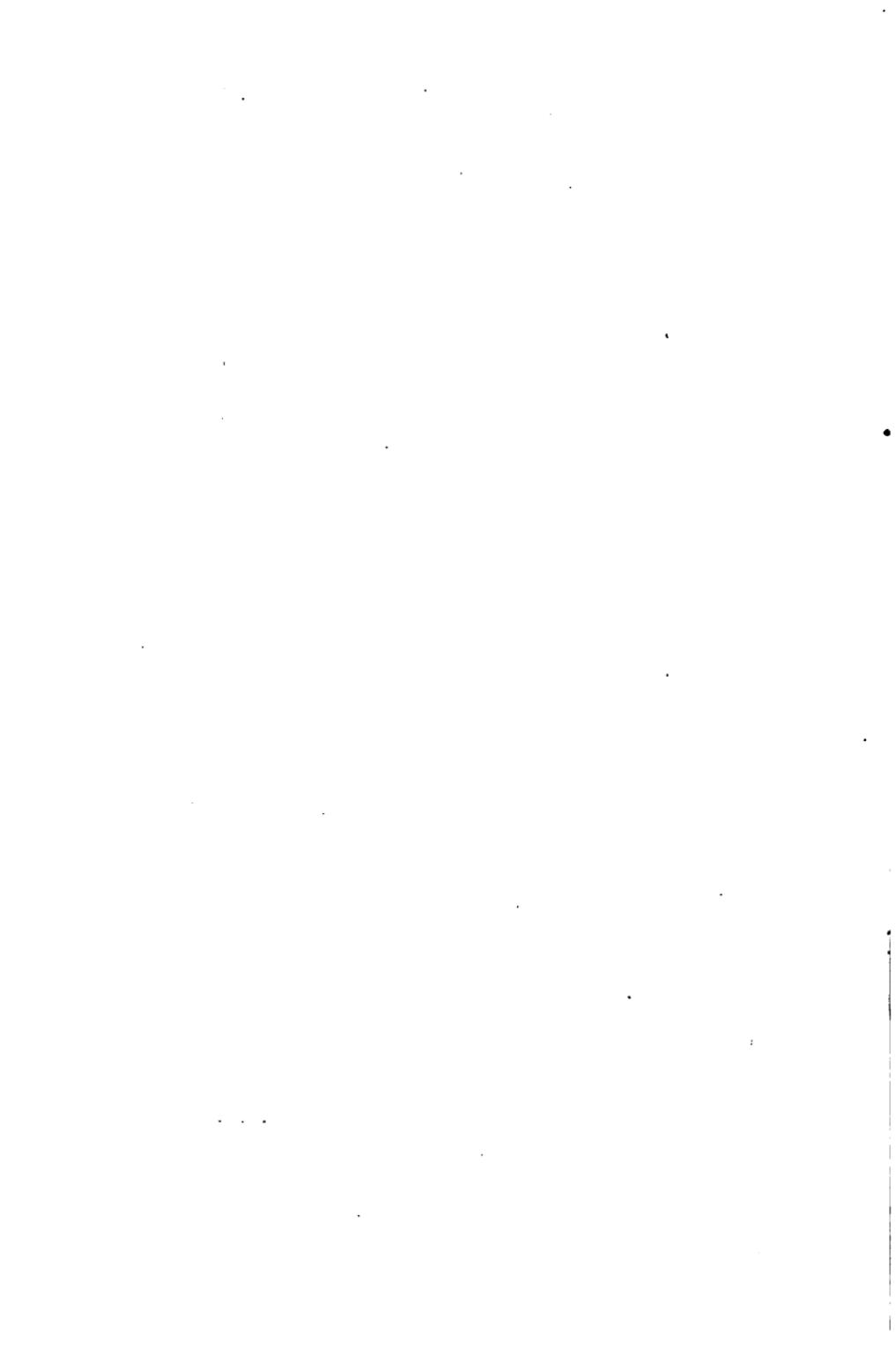
side, with a moustache and whiskers of almost black brushwood about the gaping mouth. On the rocky wall at the entrance, a red hand with outstretched fingers pointed inwards ; and when the boys had lighted their lantern and groped their way into the cave, they found more red hands on the walls, and white hands too—some pointing forwards and some backwards, some up and some down.

“Don’t they look queer, Donald?” said Harry ; “just as if they were murderers and people getting murdered poking their hands out of the stone. I wonder who did them, and what they mean.”

“Why, the *black fellows* don’t know,” answered Donald. “They say the *old people* did them, but they don’t know who the old people were. I expect a flood drowned them. Do you know the story the black fellows tell about the Flood ? They say that somewhere or other in Australia the black fellows’ father lies asleep on the ground, with his head resting on his arm ; and that he



"ON THE ROCKY WALL A RED HAND."—Page 40.



woke up ever so long ago, and that then all the country was flooded ; and that when he wakes next, he will eat up all the black fellows. They say he is a giant—taller than that blue gum on the ridge. The old fellow puts them into a great funk. Up at our place I went out one day with a black fellow after honey. He caught a native bee, and stuck a bit of down on it, and chased it till it lighted on a tree, and then he climbed up with his tomahawk, and tapped till he found where the nest was. He cut out the combs and the bee-bread before you could say ‘Jack Robinson ;’ but he took precious care to leave some of the honey for the old giant. If he’s asleep, though, I don’t see what good it would do him.”

“They’re a queer lot, the black fellows,” philosophically remarked Harry; “but they’re a long sight better than new chums—they were born in the colony just like us. A black fellow can ride like a native, but those Englishmen look so scared when a horse begins to buck.”

Just then, however, it was Harry's turn to look scared, for a great grey owl, with round eyes that gleamed like polished guineas, brushed against his face, and directly afterwards two or three flying foxes floated by, looking in the dark very much like dirty cherubim off a tombstone.

Donald laughed to see how the owl and the great bats made Harry jump, when he had been talking so big the minute before. Presently they walked into a cloud of great dusky moths that came fluttering about the lantern like butterflies' ghosts, and then they saw stalactites hanging down like sheets and chandeliers, and fruit and flowers, and plucked geese, and organ-pipes, and joining on to the stalagmites on the floor, and making columns and cloisters and great hour-glasses. Some of the stalactites rang in tune when they rapped them, like harmonicons. It would have been a very jolly place to wander about in, if the water had not dropped off the roof down the napes of their necks, and if they

had not been obliged to look out so sharp to keep from tumbling down little precipices, or into the streams they could hear running, and the ponds they could sometimes see shining through the darkness.

They had scrambled down three or four of the little precipices (the cave's floor was like a great rough flight of stairs) when they stopped to look at a pillar that was just like a huge candle with a "winding-sheet."

"Why, there's a red hand up there," said Harry, pointing to the winding-sheet.

Donald could not see it, and so Harry put the lantern on to the end of a long stick he carried, and held it up to what he said was the hand. But still Donald could not see one.

"You must be blind, then," said Harry impatiently; "there, don't you see now?" and he pushed the lantern against the stalactite.

Down the lantern dropped, rolled over for a few feet, and disappeared. The boys joined

hands, and groped with the stick after the lantern ; but presently the end of the stick ran on without anything to stop it, and if they had not pulled themselves up very quick, they would have fallen down the deepest drop they had come to yet. At the bottom was a light, dancing about like a will-o'-the-wisp. The lantern had tumbled into one of the black subterranean streams, and soon, either the water put the candle out, or else the lantern was carried underground. At any rate, Donald and Harry were left quite in the dark.

“We must keep on lighting matches,” said Donald ; “or, perhaps, we could make torches out of this stick—it seems dry. Where are the matches ?—You had them.”

But when Harry felt in his pocket, the match-box was gone. He felt in all his pockets, and Donald felt in all *his* pockets, but not a single match could they find. Then, at first, they did feel very much afraid, and I think you would

have been afraid, too, however plucky you may be. The cave was pitch-dark where they had got to. They could hear water dripping and dashing and running all round about them—some of it a long way down. When they moved, they were forced to tap about with the stick like a blind man, and to slide their feet along the ground at a snail's pace, for fear of suddenly tumbling down some deep pit or into a well-like water-hole. And if they could find their way back to the great steps they had come down, it would be very hard to find the proper places to ascend, and to scramble up them in the dark. It had not been easy scrambling down them, even with a lantern. No wonder Donald and Harry felt frightened. But funking, they knew, would do no good. If they sat down scared in a corner, there they would have to starve, most likely ; for no one at Wonga-Wonga knew that they had started for the cave.

“ Let 's say our prayers,” said Donald (it was

Harry told me); and when they had said them, they gripped hold tight of one another's hands, and set out.

At first they went quite wrong. After stumbling about for nearly half an hour, they had got again to the top of the precipice the lantern had tumbled down, instead of to the foot of the first one they had to climb up; but then they felt their way along by the wall of the cave, until they came at last to the bottom of the drop they wanted. They could not always keep by the wall. Every now and then their guiding-stick went splash into water. Sometimes, too, they ran full butt against rocks that knocked sparks out of their eyes, and made their noses bleed, and tore their clothes into ragged ribbons; and Donald lost one of his shoes, and Harry both of his, in some mud, as sticky as birdlime, that they floundered into. But, at last, as I have said, they came to the foot of the first great step they had to mount. They felt about with their stick,

but for a long time they could find no foot or hand-hold. And when they did come by-and-bye to jutting big stones, they were no good, because a waterfall was tumbling down them. The stream it made below was not very broad, but it ran so fast that the boys could not pole how deep it was ; and so they had to be very careful in crossing it, and they would not have been able to cross it at all, if it had not been for a great stone in the middle that the stick tapped against. As it was, Harry (who was more slapdash in his ways than Donald) went into the water up to his waist before he got to the other side. When they had crossed, they seemed at first as far off from the cave's mouth as ever ; but, after ten minutes' groping about, they got into a zigzag crack in the great step, through which, with more tearing of clothes and bruising of shins, they managed to wriggle up to the sloping platform above. They had learnt wisdom from experience, and did not try to strike right across it. Perhaps

you have tried to walk right across a common in a fog, and have come out not far from the place you started from: well, Donald and Harry had discovered that making short cuts in the pitch-dark Cave of the Red Hand was like that, and so they tapped along the edge of the step until they came to the cave's wall once more, and then followed that—running up against rocks, and floundering into mud and water as before—until they got to the foot of the next step. When they had climbed a good way up the last step they had to mount, they met with a great disappointment. There were no more stones sticking out for them to take hold of. They swished the stick backwards and forwards like a scythe, but it went over the rock just as if it had been a brick wall.

So they had to go back and try again, and it was so long before they found a mounting-place, that they began to lose heart, and fear that, after all, they would have to die in the cave, with no-

thing but the pointing red hand at the entrance to show where they were. But at last their heads rose above the edge of the great step, and there, far away, the moonlight was pouring in at the cave's mouth, and making silver gauze of the mist just inside. Close by them the cave still looked very gloomy; but oh, how jolly they felt! When the owls and the flying foxes brushed against Harry now, he could have shaken hands—or wings—with them, they seemed so much like old friends welcoming him back to life.

It did not take the boys long to get out of the cave when they had the moonlight to guide them, and they did not stop long to look at the inwards-pointing red hand, at which they had looked so curiously when they were going to follow its direction. Then the faded red fingers seemed burnt up by the blazing sunlight; now they pointed dim beneath the dewy moonlight. When the boys thought of the dismal darkness the hand pointed to, they hurried by it as if it

had power to push them back into the gloom. In spite of their hobble, Cornstalk and Flora M'Ivor had strayed a long way, and it was early Sunday morning before they and their riders got back to Wonga-Wonga. The bleeding, battered, tattered boys were so full of their adventure that they were quite angry to find every one there sound asleep. They went to bed without waking even the dogs, and heard next day at breakfast that, as they had been seen riding in the direction of the next station, it had been thought that they had been kept there to spend the night. They felt doubly fortunate then in having got out of the Cave of the Red Hand, for no one, plainly enough, would have dreamt of looking for them in it.

IV.

ABOUT SNAKES.

HERE were plenty of things in the Wonga-Wonga garden, but they were not arranged very tidily. It was hard to say where the beds ended, and the paths began ; and near the bottom fence there was a patch that was exceedingly slovenly. In the midst of loquat trees and peach trees, and ninety-days' corn, and sweet potatoes, and golden-blossomed pumpkin vines, there was a coarse grass-plat, almost as big as a little paddock. A clump of prickly pear grew in it, and one great aloe, with names cut on some of its pointed leaves, and the ends of

others hacked off as if they were sword-bayonets broken in receiving a charge of cavalry. And yet the grass-plat looked cosy too—shut in with fruit and flowers and vegetables and green corn, or blossoming corn, or brown corn hanging down great heavy cobs, like truncheons with brass-headed nails driven close together into them, and with the hot Australian sunshine pouring down on the long dry tangled grass. Bees buzzed about over it, and butterflies, with white drops on their black velvet wings, found out its flowers, and the pumpkins, squashes, cucumbers, vegetable marrows, and rock and water-melons were fond of crawling into the hay-like grass, to bulge out and ripen into gold and bloomy green, and speckled green and yellow. The guinea-fowl and turkeys were very fond of laying their eggs in the grass-plat too ; and in late spring and summer, and early autumn, snakes were very fond of it also. Up-country people in Australia get careless about snakes, as colliers in England

get careless about fire-damp and choke-damp — just because they may be killed by them any day. One day Mrs. Lawson put on her sun-bonnet, with a curtain that came half-way down her back, and went to the grass-plat to look for eggs, and Harry went with her. All of a sudden she started up with a great black snake coiled round her arm. Though Harry was a slapdash little fellow, he could be cool enough sometimes. The instant he saw what was the matter he darted at the snake before it could bite, just like a snake when it springs, as stiff and as straight as an arrow, and caught it round the throat so tightly with both hands, that it could not put its horrid fangs either into them or into his mother's arm. Mrs. Lawson didn't shriek, but stood quite still (though her face was very white, both for Harry's sake and her own), so that the snake might not get a chance to wriggle free: it was lashing about with its nasty tail, and swelling out as if it wanted to burst

itself. Harry knew that Sydney was taking an after-breakfast pipe on the verandah, and shouted as loudly as the throttling he was giving the snake would let him :

“ Syd, there’s a beastly snake on mamma ! I’ve grabbed him.”

All the Lawsons could put this and that together; so, before he rushed to the rescue, Sydney dashed into the keeping-room for the carving-knife. He was not long about it.

“ Hold on like grim death,” he said to Harry, when he ran down; and then he sliced through the snake just under Harry’s fingers. The head part gave such a jump that, after all, the horrid fangs nearly went into Mrs. Lawson’s arm, but Harry managed to keep hold of the slippery thing until he could fling it ever so far off; whilst the headless part untwined from his mother’s arm, and writhed about on the ground in a very uncanny fashion. When the head had been smashed with a stone, and kicked up to a

great red boil of an ant-hill, and the tail dragged after it, for the ants to pick the bones, both parts still kept twitching every now and then.

“Snakes can’t die outright, you know, until after sundown.” said Harry.

“Confound the beast! He’s made me break my pipe,” said Sydney.

But though they talked in that cool way, they had both hugged their mother like boa-constrictors when she was safe from the black snake; and when she gave over kissing Harry for a minute, Sydney had clapped him on the back, and said that he was proud to have a game little fellow like that for a brother. Harry scarcely knew whether he was more pleased by the kissing or the clapping—although he did not quite relish being called a *little* fellow.

Black snakes, and all kinds of snakes, swarmed about Wonga-Wonga in warm weather. In cold weather—such cold weather, that is, as they have in Australia—the snakes lie up in holes. They

are not very brisk when they first come out in spring. They seem to be rubbing their eyes, so to speak, after their long sleep; but perhaps they are most dangerous then, because they are more likely to let you tread on them, instead of getting out of your way, as they are generally glad enough to do.

One bright spring morning in September (seasons are turned topsy-turvy, you know, in Australia), Donald had gone down with John Jones's little boy to pull up some night lines that Harry and Donald had set in the creek, Harry was too lazy to turn out that morning, so Donald had got little Johnny Jones to go with him. Johnny had no shoes or stockings on, and as he ran to pull one of the lines up, he set his bare foot on a sluggish snake, coiled up like a lady's back-hair, in a hollow of a black log he was clambering over. Up came the flat head and bit Johnny's great toe, and off the snake wriggled. Poor little Johnny was dreadfully

scared, but Donald made him sit down on the log, and tied one of the fishing lines so tightly round the toe that it almost cut to the bone. Then Donald went down on his knees, and sucked the poison out as well as he could, and spat it out on the ground. What with the bite, and the fright, and the tight string, Johnny could not manage to walk. So Donald took him up on his back like a sack, and trotted off to the house with him, and told Mr. Lawson about him. Mr. Lawson at once cut out the bitten part with a sharp pen-knife, and blazed some gunpowder in the hollow, and, except that he had to limp a little for a day or two, Johnny came to no harm. But if it had not been for Donald, very likely his leg would have swelled up, and he would have grown sleepy, and perhaps died, long before the doctor could have been fetched from Jerry's Town; and when the doctor had come, perhaps he would not have been able to do any good. If "Old Cranky" or

any of the black fellows had been on the station, *they* might have cured Johnny perhaps.

Old Cranky was a half-crazy, transported poacher, whom the squatters paid to wander about their runs, killing dingoes. Though he *was* half-crazy, he was sharp enough in doing that; and he was a snake-tamer too. He used to carry little ones about in his cabbage-tree hat, and trouser-pockets, and the bosom of his blue blouse, and pull out a bundle of them every now and then like a pocket-handkerchief. He left the fangs in them, and they sometimes bit him, but he had found out something that always cured *him* at any rate; and the blacks have got something of the same kind. Some people say that when a stump-lizard has been bitten in a fight with a snake, it eats the leaves of a little herb that prevents the poison from taking effect, and that the blacks and snake-charmers have found out what the herb is. The stump-lizard is a thick spotted brown and blue thing that is very

fond of killing snakes ; though it is so lazy generally, that when it thinks you want to hurt it, it won't take the trouble to run away, but only turns round and makes ugly faces at you. To be sure it can give you a nasty bite if you do lay hold of it. The big-headed laughing jack-ass is very fond, too, of stabbing snakes and breaking their backs with its strong beak. It seems to enjoy the jobbing job, as if it thought that it was only serving them out fairly for eating birds and birds' eggs. One day Donald shot a snake that was climbing up a tree to a bird's-nest ; and another day he and Harry came upon one that was mesmerizing a lot of little diamond sparrows. Half of it was coiled up like a corkscrew, and the rest went backwards and forwards, like a boat's tiller when no one has got hold of it ; and the little birds kept on coming nearer and nearer, as if they were being drawn into its open mouth. When Harry shied a stick and

frightened them away, the snake looked round at him quite savagely before it rustled off.

There were plenty of snakes, as I have said, about Wonga-Wonga. Great black-backed and yellow-backed fellows crawled into the huts sometimes when the men were away, and coiled themselves up in the boots and blankets; and little lithe mud-brown whip-snakes used to pop out their wicked-looking little heads between the planks of the wool-shed, and the house verandah, and the weather-boards of the barn, and then pop in again before a gun could be pointed at them. Whilst the snakes were about, too, it was a hazardous thing to pull a log out of the wood-heap. You might have fancied that Harry and Donald saw enough snakes to keep them from wanting to hear about any more, but Old Cranky's snake stories fascinated them as the snakes fascinate the little birds. He told them about the death-adder, with its feet like a lizard's, and its sting like a wasp's, besides the venomous fangs

in its thick head ; and of the huge boas that he had seen "ever so far up country," joining the trees together with great cat's cradles. There *is* a stumpy snake in Australia that is, perhaps, particularly dangerous, because it lies still to be trodden on ; and there *is*, also, a small python ; and out of these men like Old Cranky have made up their death-adders and their big boas. When the boys asked him to let them get a peep at these hideous creatures, he always put them off with the excuse that there were none for miles thereabouts ; but he did show them something in the snake line that they did not forget in a hurry.

From wandering about the country so much alone, and not being afraid of snakes, Old Cranky knew of places that even the blacks did not know of. It was for one of these that he, and the boys, and his gingerbread kangaroo-bitch, and a shaggy old mongrel, with an ear and a half and a quarter of a tail, that could find game like a pointer and

bring it in like a retriever, started one summer's day. The old man made a great mystery of what he was going to show the boys. Except that he took them by short cuts that they were not familiar with, they saw nothing remarkable until they came to the brim of a deep little basin, with a big water-hole fringed with thick scrub at the bottom. They had not gone many steps down the side before Lag—that was the mongrel's name—lifted up his fore-foot.

“What's the dog pointing at?” asked Harry.

“Quail, I suppose?” said Donald.

“No, it ain't *quail*,” Old Cranky answered with a grin. “Can't ye smell 'em? Well, ye'll see 'em soon. Keep close ahind me. Don't ye tread but jest where I goes.”

They *did* see them soon. It was *snakes* the old man meant. He had brought them to what he called the Snakes' Corroboree. There they were in scores: snakes with backs like Spanish leather, and snakes with backs like a gaudy-



"THE SNAKES CORROBOREE. —*Page* 62.

patterned carpet ; snakes with white china bellies and with striped china bellies ; snakes with verdigrised-copper bellies, and with scoured-copper bellies ; snakes of all colours and all sizes, up to seven feet or so ; snakes wriggling like eels through the water, and floating on it like straight sticks ; snakes undulating through the scrub ; snakes basking on dry ground, curled up like coils of rope, or littered about like black cravats untidily thrown down upon the floor ; snakes twined round tree-poles like variegated creepers, and snakes dangling their heads from grey branches like waving clusters of poisonous fruit.

“ I 'll go bail ye niver see the like of that afore,” said Old Crandy. “ Ain't it a pretty sight? I niver showed it to nobody afore. I likes to come an' watch 'em by myself. Me an' the dog, that is. Lag likes it 'most as well as me. Fan, there, is afeard. She stayed outside, ye see.”

The boys felt almost as afraid of Lag and

Old Cranky as they were of the snakes when they heard of such peculiar tastes. Heartily glad were they when they joined the kangaroo-bitch outside the horrible basin, and they felt relieved, too, when they reached a track they knew, and the crazy old snake-charmer slouched off on his way to the next station with his dogs behind him.

Tired as they were with their long walk when they got back to Wonga-Wonga, Harry and Donald did not have "pleasant dreams and sweet repose" that night. They both of them dreamt of the Snakes' Corrobboree ; and, I scarcely need say, they never took the trouble to find their way to it again.

V.

LOST MAGGIE.

B LACK FELLOWS and old bushmen-- and young bushmen too, for the matter of that--cannot make out how it is that "new chums" lose themselves in Australia. *They* can tell which way to go by the place of the sun, and the dip of the country, and all kinds of little things that new comers would not understand even if they noticed them ; and so they laugh at new comers for getting lost. But for all their bumptious talk, people of "colonial experience" sometimes get lost in the bush, and are never heard of again, like ships that have gone down

at sea without any surviving eye, except God's, to see them sink.

Sad stories are told about these poor lost people. Sometimes they disappear for ever, like rain-drops swallowed by the ocean ; sometimes they are found wandering about mad ; sometimes they are found starved to death ; sometimes just dying. Sometimes a heap of picked and bleached bones is found, with nothing to tell the name of the person whose flesh has been torn or has rotted off them. Sometimes the name, and one or two sprawling, half-unintelligible words have been feebly scratched on the pannikin that rusts hard by.

You may fancy, then, how dreadfully frightened a mother in the bush is when her little child is missing. But, though some of the little strays are never recovered, a great many of them are wonderfully protected, and come upon at last. It is about a little girl that was lost in the bush that I am going to tell you.

One morning I had ridden over to Wonga-Wonga, and was having lunch with Mr. Lawson and Sydney, when Mrs. Jones rushed into the room, crying as if her heart would break.

"Oh, master," she sobbed out, "I can't find my Maggie; an' I've been seekin' her an hour an' more. Oh! it was you who persuaded Jones to come when you was over at home, an' if you don't find my Maggie, I shall do myself or some on ye a mischief, I feel sure I shall. Oh, oh, oh! my 'ead feels fit to burst!"

Mr. Lawson quieted the poor screaming woman, and, when he found that little Maggie was really lost, he had horses run up, and every man and boy about the station started in search of Mrs. Jones's lost lamb.

Little Maggie was a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, laughing, lisping little pet; but if she had been a crosspatch everybody would have looked for her just as carefully. Harry and Donald bounced out of the weather-board cottage that was used

for a school-room, like pellets from a popgun, when they heard the news ; and after them the tutor rushed to horse, though he wasn't much of a rider. John Jones was fetched up from the paddock where he was ploughing, and when he heard that little Maggie was lost, he made a rush at a young horse that had only had the tacklings on once or twice, and would have got on it too, somehow, though he *had* been thrown over its head the next second, if the horsebreaker had not laid hold of him, and given him a leg up on to a horse fitter for his riding.

In the course of the day the news spread to the stations round about, and before nightfall the whole countryside was up hunting for poor little Maggie. The shepherds left their dogs to look after their flocks, if they *had* dogs, and their flocks to look after themselves if they *hadn't* dogs, to scour the bush.

Mrs. Lawson and her girls searched all round the head station as if they were looking for a

pin. Even Miss Smith mastered her dread of the bush, and went quite a quarter of a mile away from the house, all by herself, as she afterwards related proudly, even into places where she couldn't see the house, and where she was dreadfully afraid that a bushranger would carry her off, or a snake would bite her, or the little imported bull would run at his timorous country-woman. As for poor Mrs. Jones, she kept on rushing out into the bush, determined to walk on until she dropped, and then rushing back, before she had walked a mile, to hear whether little Maggie, or any tidings of little Maggie, had been brought home.

Some of those who had been hunting for the little girl gave up the hunt at the end of the first day; some went on hunting with fire-sticks during the night, and then went back to their work next morning very cross because nothing had come of their kindness, and also because—pity often makes people cross—they couldn't help

thinking of the poor father and mother, and of how *they* would feel if *their* little ones had "gone a-missing." Others camped out when the sun had gone down on one day's unsuccessful search, that they might be fresh to renew their search on the morrow. Harry and Donald were two of these. They had thoroughly fagged themselves out, poking here and poking there, and then riding, as if for a wager, to some place where one or other of them had fancied they might, perhaps, find some traces of poor little Maggie. They were too tired even to be hungry when they got off their horses, as the stars were coming out. They almost fell asleep as they took the saddles off their horses, and were soon snoring between the saddle-flaps they used for pillows.

When the boys woke next morning they were as hungry as fox-hunters, but what were they to do for a breakfast? Donald saw a grass tree, and remembered what he had seen the black fellows do with grass trees on his father's station,

which was farther up the country than Wonga-Wonga.

"It looks as if it would come up easy," said Donald; "let's loosen the earth round it a bit though. Now then, Harry, lay hold, and pull with a will, as old Tom the sailor says."

The two boys laid hold of the queer crooked stump, and pulled with *such* a will that presently flat they tumbled on their backs, with the grass tree between them. The root was rotten, and swarmed with fat grubs. They made a black fellow's breakfast off these, and then they saddled their horses, and off they rode again.

They had not gone far before they came upon King Dick-a-Dick, admiring himself at a water-hole. He was in full dress, and he seemed very proud of it, as he made a looking-glass of the water, and then tossed up his head again. His Majesty's crown was a battered white hat, and he wore a pair of light-striped knee-breeches—that was all his dress. He had had the hat and the

breeches given him at some of the stations near, and the settlers about there had given him a brass chain too, and a brass plate engraved—

“ H. M. Dick-a-Dick,
King of the 'Possum Tribe,' ”

with a 'possum engraved underneath. The 'possum was the crest, so to speak, of King Dick-a-Dick's tribe. Now this was the tribe from which Harry and Donald had had such a narrow escape, and, therefore, they felt rather nervous when they saw King Dick-a-Dick standing by the water-hole with his spear in his hand. But his Majesty was anxious to conciliate. He was fond of tobacco and flour, and he and his people had run short of both since they had been on bad terms with the whites. So, as soon as he saw the boys rein in, he stuck his spear, point downwards, into the ground, and beckoned to them to come on, grinning as if the top of his head was coming off. That was *his* way of giving “a winning smile.” When he learnt what the boys



"H.M. DICK-A-DICK, KING OF THE POSSUM TRIBE."—Page 72.



business was, he chuckled greatly at the thought of white fellows trying to find any one in the bush without black trackers, and then proposed that he and the boys should share the credit of finding the little girl. He made sure that he *could* find her. The direction in which she had left the station was known, so Dick-a-Dick took the boys back to within about a mile and a half of home, and then began to beat about. He went down on his hands and knees, and put his nose to the ground like a dog. Presently he stopped at an ant-hill, peered about for a minute, and then jumped up, and cut a caper. The boys couldn't make it out, but he had discovered the mark of a tiny little bare heel in a dent on the ant-hill. When he had once found Maggie's track, he scarcely ever lost it. On he went, walking with his nose almost as low as his toes. He found out little stones that had been moved, and grass-blades that had been scarcely brushed by poor little Maggie's bare feet. He found out

too the blood that had come from a scratch in one of them, got by scrambling over a splintery log.

“Dat where piccaninny lubra stop to drink,” said Dick-a-Dick, pointing to a “crab-hole”—the hole made by a bullock’s hoof—on whose side he could see the print of a chubby little brow. “Missy proud now, pick waratah,” said Dick-a-Dick soon afterwards, as he gathered up the still crimson leaves of the flower which the little girl had bruised and thrown down. “Now Missy ‘fraid o’ debil-debil,” said Dick-a-Dick by-and-bye, when he came to a place in which the tracks, invisible to the boys’ eyes, were so bewilderingly visible to him on all sides that he did not know at first which to follow. He soon found the right one, however, and led the boys to a place in which he said the little girl must have slept.

So they kept up the search until, after travelling for hours in a circuitous zigzag, they came

upon poor little Maggie, not four miles from home, but on the opposite side of the station to that from which she had started, coiled up in a black, jagged, charred tree-stump, with bright-eyed, basking little lizards watching her. Of course, the lizards vanished as Dick-a-Dick and the boys drew near, but his sharp eyes had seen something peculiar in their bright ones. Poor little Maggie was sound asleep; her fat little face, and neck, and arms, and legs, were sadly scratched. In a scratched, podgy little hand she held a posy of withered wild flowers.

When she woke and saw Dick-a-Dick, trying to look specially amiable, grinning down upon her, she shrieked out, "Mammy!" But when she saw the boys, she jumped up and ran to them, and hid her face between them, and clung to them with two little leech-like arms. They tried to explain to her that if it had not been for her "nas'y b'ack man" she might never have seen her "Mammy" again; and Dick-a-Dick

grinned his broadest grin to propitiate her ; but it was no use. She screamed whenever her eyes fell upon Dick-a-Dick. And yet, according to her own pretty little prattle, she had not been "*much f'ightened in the thoods.*" She had seen "*nas'y b'ack 'igglin' thin's,*" but "*the kin' yady*" —whoever that might be—"thoodn't 'et 'em bite me."

Harry took Maggie on his horse, and cantered on in front, and Donald and Dick-a-Dick cantered behind on Flora M'Ivor.

What a reception they had when they got to the station, for they were getting anxious there about the boys as well as the little girl ! The head-station shepherds had come in with their sheep, and a good many of the people who had been searching for a couple of days had gathered at the station quite dispirited at their lack of luck. They all gave a great cheer when Cornstalk and the mare laid down their ears, and brought up their four riders at a steeple-chase gallop.

When Mrs. Jones had almost squeezed the breath out of poor little Maggie, she tried to garotte Harry and Donald, and then hugged Dick-a-Dick; and John Jones seemed inclined to hug all three of them, too, when he had done his best to press the little life his wife had left in her out of little Maggie; and then Mrs. Jones went into hysterics, and John Jones ran indoors and hid his face in the bed-clothes, and blubbered for a quarter of an hour; and everybody thought the better of him because he blubbered.

Just wasn't there a supper at Wonga-Wonga that night! And didn't Dick-a-Dick tuck into it? And didn't Harry and Donald, between them, eat nearly half as much as he did?

VI.

AN AUSTRALIAN DROUGHT.

“WHAT a set of crawlers you are in Jerry’s Town, Mr. Howe!” said Harry Lawson to me, one frizzlingly hot day. I was staying in Jerry’s Town then, and Harry had ridden in to meet the mail, and take back the Wonga-Wonga newspapers and letters. “I shouldn’t like,” Harry went on, “to live in a town. I should feel choked with such a lot of houses about me. Father talks about England sometimes, but I’m sure he likes the colony twenty times better. Houses everywhere, and all the little bush you’ve got left cut up into paddocks! *I* wouldn’t live in England if you

paid me for it. You brag about your horses, but they can't run against ours, when they do come out. I wonder they live out the voyage, from the way I've heard you coddle them. Look at *our* horses—*they* don't want corn and cloths, just as if they were babies. You can ride them for a hundred miles, and turn them out to grass all in a sweat, and yet they're as fresh as paint for another hundred miles next day—aren't you, Cornstalk?" said Harry, proudly patting the damp neck of his favourite steed.

Harry was always very fond of "cracking up the colony," but he was especially inclined to do so that forenoon, having had his temper somewhat irritated (although he protested that he was as cool as a water-melon) by the hot wind that had been blowing for three days. I have been in glass-works, and close by the mouths of blast-furnaces, but the heat of an Australian hot wind is worse than theirs. The perspiration it brings out does not cool, and the warm beads are licked up the

instant they ooze out upon the forehead and the cheeks. If a vitrifying brick could feel, it would sympathize with a "new chum" in an Australian hot wind. When the "southerly buster" comes after the hot wind, rushing with the chill still on from the South Pole, I have seen people ripping open their shirts to let the cold breeze blow right round them. The hot wind, too, makes the eyes smart and itch dreadfully. When Harry was talking to me that day—shamming that he did not feel the heat in the least—a good many people in Jerry's Town had got "the blight." Their eyes were bunged up just as if they had been fighting, though they did keep on dabbing rags dipped in alum-water up to them. And then, as if the blight was not bad enough, flies got into the corners of the eyes, and sucked away with their thirsty probosces. I have heard of a Frenchman who committed suicide because, as he left a letter to say, he was "so bothered by the flies that life was not worth keeping at

such a price." I think that foolish man must have been an Australian immigrant. The flies at the time I am telling you about were really a dreadful nuisance in Jerry's Town. They buzzed about one's head like swarming bees, they covered one's back like a shirt of mail, at meal-times they made the chops and steaks look as black as if they had been smothered in magnified peppercorns. It *was* hot then. The mercury stood at a good bit over 100° in the shade: it was almost impossible to find out what it stood at in the sun without getting a sunstroke. At every corner poor dogs were lying with their tongues out askew, panting like high-pressure steamboats just about to blow up.

For some time we had seen a few dark clouds on the hilly horizon, and heard the low rumble of distant thunder. Oh, how we hoped that the storm would work up our way, and drench us; but for months not a drop of rain had fallen in our parts. Even in Jerry's Town we began to

feel anxious about our water-supply ; both the creek and the Kakadua had sunk so low—the creek had become a mere straggling chain of very shallow ponds—and so many bullocks, and sheep, and horses had been driven in, or had found their way, from long distances round, to drink up what water there was to be had.

The tall emu, with its hairy rusty-black feathers, is a shy bird, and, though Jerry's Town was a very quiet little place, an emu had not been seen within a dozen miles of it for years ; but during that long drought the emus stalked right through Macquarie Street in Jerry's Town to get to the water. Some of them were shot ; one of them was so very thirsty that it let itself be knocked on the head like a "booby," through its anxiety to crook its long neck into the creek ; but the poor birds were not nearly so fat as they generally are. They were half-starved as well as parched with thirst. Very little oil (emu oil is a Bush all-heal) was got out of them when they

were put into the pot. I dare say you have often growled over wet English weather—especially when it put off a picnic or a cricket match—but, you see, people in Australia are not as ready as you are to say,

“ Rain, rain, go away,
And come again some other day.”

Sunlight is a very beautiful thing, but when it threatens to kill one it does not seem so beautiful.

When Harry made the polite speech to me I quoted at starting, I was lounging, smoking, in a rocking-chair on a verandah, and could not help feeling that I *must* look very much like “a crawler” to the upright little fellow who looked down on me from the top of Cornstalk, with his leather letter-bag strapped across his grass-cloth jumper. He had ridden ever so many miles through the hot wind, and was going to ride back ever so many miles through it, and yet he gave himself the unconcerned airs of a young salamander.

“My word! you *are* a lazy lot,” he proceeded presently. “Nobody here seems to be doing anything but smoking and nobblerizing. There’s a whole mob of fellows shouting for spiders and stone fences at the ‘Macquarie Arms,’ and the ‘Royal,’ and the ‘General Bourke,’ and when I came by the police-barracks I saw the sergeant and all the constables with their coats off under the fig tree in the yard—half of them asleep, and the other half smoking. What do you think that lazy old pig Reynolds was doing? I had to take a message to him from father about some Court House business, and when I got to his place I couldn’t make anybody hear. So I went in and poked about till I got down into that little cellar of his where he keeps his beer, and there was old Reynolds, with *all* his clothes off, on the bricks, and his Chinaman pitching water on him out of a bucket. *He’s* a nice fellow to be Clerk of Petty Sessions! If Englishmen can’t stand our climate, they oughtn’t to come to it, and then expect

us to pay them wages for shirking their work. There's old Biggs, the postmaster. He's been long enough in the colony, you'd think, to get used to it—he might almost have been one of the First Fleeters—and yet he kept me waiting ever so long for my letters. He was 'so overcome with the heat,' poor man! in lifting the mail-bag out of the cart, that he had to go and nobblerize at the 'Royal' before he felt equal to opening it. I declare little Marston, the mail guard, is the only fellow I have seen in Jerry's Town to-day with a mite of go in him—though he *is* an Englishman. But then they say he used to be a lieutenant in the army. Look there, Mr. Howe: your English officers, that you think such heavy swells at home, are glad to get us to employ them as mail guards, and milkmen, and things like that. I wonder how little Marston likes carrying a carbine and lugging about the letter-bags."

The heat, although he professed not to care a

pin for it, had so plainly affected Harry's temper that I invited him to get off his horse and finish his abuse of things English in the shade of the verandah. At first he loftily declined to dismount, but he did get down, and stayed chatting with me so long that I could see he did not quite relish the thought of his hot ride home. Harry's was not cooling conversation. Marston had told him of dozens of teamsters that the mail had passed on the road "stuck up" round dry water-holes and fast-drying fords, with three-fourths of their bullocks dead, and the others so weakened that they could only get upon their knees when they tried to rise from the ground. Harry had had a chat, too, with a bullock-driver who had managed to struggle on into Jerry's Town that morning.

"He looked just like a black fellow," said Harry, "with the dust and the heat; and he says that up the country on M'Grath's Plains there is not a drop of water to be got for fifty

miles any way, and the sun and the bush-fires have burnt every bit of grass right down to the roots. The country looks as black as if it was covered with cinders, he says, and there are cracks a foot wide in the ground."

Things were not much better at Wonga-Wonga, Harry informed me. Most of the water-holes were dried up, and bulls and bullocks, cows and calves, sheep and lambs, brood-mares and foals, were lying rotting round them, with crows and carrion hawks feasting on their carcasses, or else half buried in the sticky mud at the bottom which the sun was baking as hard as brick. The sheep that were left alive were lying panting under the trees, too languid even to bleat; and the bullocks were standing crowded together in what had once been swamps and chains of ponds, bellowing dolefully, or lashing off the flies in silent despair. Mr. Lawson, and Sydney, and the overseer were riding about in search of grass and water, so that they might not "lose

all the beasts," and everything in the garden and cultivation-paddocks was shrivelled up into tinder and touchwood. That morning, as Harry rode in, he had seen parrots and lories gasping like fishes out of water on the grey branches, and falling dead, as if they had been shot by the sunbeams, when they tried to fly across the open. When Harry galloped homewards at last through the blazing light and the fiery air, it seemed strange that he did not drop to the ground like the parrots.

We had had bush-fires in our neighbourhood for some time, but that night the bush seemed to be alight for miles all round Jerry's Town; and next day, although the flames were not so plain (until the sun had gone down again), grey and black smoke dimmed even the blazing sun, and rolled in stifling clouds into the little town. When everything is dried up as things get dried up in an Australian drought, a lucifer match, or the ashes of a pipe, carelessly thrown down, may

set square miles of forest on fire; an old pannikin or an empty bottle may act as a burning-glass, and do the same; and sometimes, for the sake of the luxuriant young grass that will spring up where old withered grass has been burnt, when the rains come, settlers selfishly set fire to it, if the wind is not blowing towards their home-steads, reckless of the loss of life and property they may cause—it is impossible to say how far beyond. That night and day (as I guessed at the time, and as I learnt afterwards) were a dreadful night and day for my Wonga-Wonga friends. Mr. Lawson, and Sydney, and the tutor, and the boys, and a good many of the men too, sat up all night. The women and girls went to bed, but they couldn't go to sleep, the air was so stiflingly close and smoky, and it was so startling when they looked out of their bed-room windows to see the flames leaping redder and redder out of the brooding and rolling smoke-clouds. The moon was up, but her light—made bloody by

the lurid atmosphere through which it seemed to have to *force* its way—only gave a still more uncanny look to the landscape.

Poor Miss Smith was half wild with fear, and Mrs. Lawson and her girls, although they did not show their fear so much, were really more frightened at heart, perhaps, because they understood better what their fate would be if from one quarter or another a roaring bush-fire rushed down right upon them. Not much breakfast was eaten at Wonga-Wonga next morning : haggard, pale faces looked anxiously across the table at one another.

Thicker and thicker the smoke rolled in ; the heat every moment grew hotter. The head-station sheep were still in their hurdles, gasping for breath. What was the good of sending them out into the burning bush, even if the shepherds would have gone with them ? The men stood about watching the fires, and wondering what was to become of them. They would have made

a rush for Jerry's Town, and Mr. Lawson would have sent all his womenfolk thither too, but the bush was on fire between the station and the township. Harry and Donald, of course, were scared like other people, but—boys are such queer little animals—in the midst of their fright they could not help feeling pleased that they would have no school that day, and so they half enjoyed the general consternation.

The hot wind was blowing directly from the north, driving the roaring, crackling flames and the suffocating smoke before it. If it had kept in that quarter, the house, and huts, and out-buildings at Wonga-Wonga would have been in great danger, since the broad road of destruction which the fierce fire was eating through the bush would have passed within a furlong or two of the house, and that and its belongings might easily have been gobbled up with a side-lick or two of the bush-fire's forked tongues. But when the wind veered about half a point towards the north-

west, the Wonga-Wonga people thought it was all up with them. The rushing fire was now steering straight at them like an inevitable express train. The blinding, throat-tickling, lung-clogging smoke-clouds rolled in denser and denser. In spite of the sunlight, the grey clouds spat out pink, and russet, and golden flame plainer and plainer. Flocks of wild cockatoos flew wildly screaming overhead, making the already scared tame cockatoo grovel like a reptile as they flew by. Singed kangaroos and wallabies bounded over the garden fence. Dingoes, looking more cowardly than ever, but cowed into tameness, put their tails between their legs and slunk into the barn. Snakes wriggled along half roasted. Mobs of horses and cattle went by like a whirlwind and an earthquake in a mad stampede. Poor stupid sheep, their small brains quite addled by terror, ran hither and thither purposelessly, stood stock-still to let the flames catch them, or plunged right into the flames. It was



"THE RUSHING FIRE WAS NOW STEERING STRAIGHT AT THEM." -- *Page 92.*

an awful time ; but so long as the merest chance of life remains, it is the best policy, and our duty to Him who gave us our lives, to do our best to save them, if they can be saved without disgrace. Mr. Lawson and Sydney spirited up the men, most of whom were "astonied" like the sheep. They thought that a doom was coming down on them which it was hopeless to fight against, and so were inclined to hang down their arms helplessly. To the astonishment of all, John Jones—the "sheep," as his fellows were fond of calling him—behaved more pluckily than any of the other men. Besides his own life, he had his wife's and his children's to battle for ; he was conscientiously devoted to his master's interests ; and moreover, he seemed pleased at getting a chance of proving that, though he couldn't sit a buck-jumper, he could play the man better than those who jeered at his clumsy, timid horsemanship, when he and they had to confront a common peril on equal terms.

On roared and rushed the fire. Where there was scrub the earth seemed to be belching smoke. In the bush the giant boles of the gum trees stood up, grimly showing through their winding-sheets of smoke, and holding flags of flame in their gaunt arms. If any water had been left in the creek, the inhabitants of Wonga-Wonga would have plunged into it, even if they had run the risk of drowning in it. But there was not enough water left in the creek to wet the sole of the foot. On and on, with a roar and a crackle like that of huge crunched bones, as the trees toppled over into the under-smoke, came the fire from the north-west ; and in the opposite direction, and on both sides, the bush was also on fire.

Mrs. Lawson gathered her girls, and Miss Smith, and Mrs. Jones and *her* little ones, and the other woman servant, about her in the keeping-room, and there, in a voice clear, though it trembled, she prayed, in the midst of a chorus of wails and sobs, for resignation, and preparation

for the apparently certain fate, and yet for help to her husband and her boys and the men, who had mustered to give the inhabitants of Wonga-Wonga their last chance. In the line of the on-rushing fire there was a dried-up maize-paddock, which, if it once fairly caught, would bring the fire right down upon the station buildings. If that could be kept unburnt, the fire might just possibly pass them by.

Harry and Donald, I heard afterwards from Mr. Lawson, were just as brave as Sydney (and that was a good deal for Mr. Lawson to say, since he was very proud of Sydney) in this "beating-out" business. Fence-rails had hardly been torn down for weapons to fight against the fire, before the sapless crop caught. Men and boys (Mr. Lawson, Sydney, Harry, Donald, the tutor, and John Jones, in the van) rushed at the flames, mowing right and left, and striking down, like Highlanders with their broadswords. Donald had Highland blood in him, and wielded his timber

claymore so courageously, and yet so coolly, that those who saw him felt half inclined to cheer him, in the very face of the quickly crackling flames that were changing, as if by magic, the withered maize into red ashes. Harry was as courageous as Donald, but he was not as cool. He would have been smothered in the smoke into which he had heedlessly plunged, if Sydney had not dashed in to bring him out. Tall men as well as Harry were struck down by the heat of the fire and the heat of the sun combined. John Jones got a sunstroke that knocked him down as a butcher knocks down an ox. The horsebreaker took hold of poor John's head, and the tutor took hold of poor John's legs, and between them they dragged him off the blazing heap of maize-stalks on which he had fallen face downwards. Mr. Lawson, who had a great respect for honest John, rushed up then, and stopped beating-out for a minute or two, to carry him as far as possible out of harm's way—if any place at such a time could

be called out of harm's way. Then Mr. Lawson rushed back again, slashing away and giving the "seventh cut" with his wooden broadsword, as if he wanted to make up for lost time, and after him, up to the thickest of the fire, dashed Sydney, and Donald, and Harry, still giddy from the smoke he had swallowed. The men, too, fought the flames with almost desperate daring, but, in spite of what any one could do, they gained on the paddock. More than half of it had been consumed when the wind slanted to the N.E. farther and more suddenly than it had veered to the N.W. The fire went by the head-station buildings, gobbling up an outlying hut or two, and many a rod of fencing; but the house and most of the huts, the barn, store, wool-shed, &c., were only blistered. Mr. Lawson, nevertheless, was a good deal poorer at night than he had been when the morning dawned through the ominous banks and wreaths of smoke; but when he gathered all his people together in the evening to return thanks to the

good God for their great deliverance, he felt happier, perhaps, than he had ever felt before in his life. The house verandah was the place of common worship. The air was still stiflingly close, and poor little "salamander" Harry fainted as he leaned his scorched face against one of the half-charred verandah-posts. Sydney carried him to bed, and heroic Harry had to submit to the indignity—fortunately without being conscious of it—of being "tucked in" and kissed, not only by "dear mamma and the girls"—theirs he would have considered, perhaps, rather over-fussy, but still legitimate attentions—but also by Miss Smith and Mrs. Jones.

VII.

AN AUSTRALIAN FLOOD.

A FEW days after the great bush-fire I told you about in my last chapter, Harry and Donald came to spend a week or two with a friend of Mr. Lawson's who lived just outside Jerry's Town. The hut that was used for school-room at Wonga-Wonga had come to grief in the fire, not a bit of it being left standing, except the blackened brick chimney. The tutor was laid up, owing to his unwonted exertions at the fire, and it was thought that a little change would do the boys no harm. Accordingly, their saddle-bags were bulged out with changes of raiment ("creases" are not thought so much of in the

Bush as they would be by Belgravian swells), and Harry and Donald cantered into Jerry's Town on Cornstalk and Flora M'Ivor.

The first week they were in the township the weather was as hot as ever. Although the doors and windows were all wide open, we gasped for breath at church ; and though the clergyman's surplice looked cool, his face was so red that you could not help fancying that he wanted to pray and preach in unbuttoned shirt-sleeves. If he had been obliged to wear a thick black gown, I think he would have been suffocated. But when the boys' second Sunday in Jerry's Town came, a good bit of Jerry's Town was under water, Jerry's Flats were an inland sea, and some of the worshippers who had hung up their horses on the churchyard rails the Sunday before had had to take refuge in the township with scarcely a shirt or a gown that they could call their own.

On the Wednesday night after that first Sunday we had gone to bed as late as we could in

Jerry's Town, outside the bed-clothes, and with as little covering of any kind as was practicable. After tossing and tumbling about, and getting up every now and then to light pipes to "cool ourselves," and drive away the humming, blood-thirsty mosquitoes, we had at last fallen asleep at the fag end of the "small hours" of Thursday morning. When we awoke, with a chill on, the rain was coming down as if it did not like its own business, but wanted to get it over, and let sunlight reign and roast once more. It had knocked off shingles, and was pouring into rooms in gallons. Imagine a shower-bath without a perforated bottom—the whole of the mysteriously upheld water coming down bodily the instant the string is touched—and then, if you imagine also that the shower-bath is constantly refilled for a week or so, and that you are obliged to stand under it all the time, you will get some faint notion of the suddenness and force of Australian rain. More "annual inches" of rain, I have read, fall in sunny

Australia than in soppy Ireland, and therefore, when the Australians have learnt—perhaps from the Chinamen, whom they tried hard to keep out of their country, but to whom they are grudgingly grateful now for “summer cabbage,” &c., that they could not get from any British-blooded market-gardener—when they have learnt, I say, to wisely manage and husband their bountiful water supply, by damming rivers, and draining what would otherwise be flooded country into reservoirs, Australia will become, in many a part where it is now barren, one of the most fertile lands that the sun shines on. With such a reserve fund of water to use up, the hot Australian sun-beams will be a boon instead of a bane. In my time, however (and, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Argus*, things are not very different now), up-country Australia periodically suffered from a fast from water or a feast of it—the feast, in some respects, being even worse than the fast.

We were glad at first to hear, and see, and smell, and feel the rain, but when it steadily poured on we began to feel alarmed. Part of Jerry's Town stood on a little rise, but more than half of it was nearly on a level with Jerry's Flats ; and those, according to black fellows' tradition, had once been the bottom of a lake. There was good reason, therefore, to feel anxious when the rain kept coming down in an almost unbroken mass, and we could tell, from the rapid way in which the Kakadua and the creek rose, that up the country, too, the rain was falling in the same wholesale fashion. The people who lived in the huts on the Flats, and who had pitched their farmhouses along the river-banks for the sake of the rich alluvial soil, had still more reason to be anxious. By Thursday night there were great sheets of water, constantly getting closer to one another, out upon the Flats ; the ferry-punt at the mouth of the creek had been swept away ; and the muddy flood was washing

up into the town. Mark Tapley would have found it hard work to be jolly on that Thursday night, if he had been in Jerry's Town. The flooded-out people from the lower part of the township and the outlying huts came crowding up, like half-drowned rats, to shelter in the church or the Court House, the police-barracks or the inns, or wherever else they could find refuge ; and the waters came after them at a rate that made it doubtful whether they had not merely postponed their doom. Dim lights twinkling far off over the waste of dimly-seen waters were only comforting for a minute. How long—you thought the next minute—will they be able to go on burning ? In spite of the rush of the down-pouring rain, the wail of the wind, and the roar of the ever-rising flood, we heard every now and then the crack of an alarm gun, and fancied at any rate that we heard a wild “cooey” for help or a wilder woman's scream.

Just as dawn broke on Friday the new bridge

across the Kakadua went with a crash. (The flood had risen as high as the flooring, and eddied across it, the night before.) The swollen river dashed the big trees it had pulled up like radishes against the bridge like battering-rams. The middle of the roadway caved in ; down dropped the arches above the roadway, taking suicidal "headers ;" on rushed the heavily-laden river ; and in a few minutes a momentary glimpse of a truncated bankside pile was all that was to be seen of the fine bridge which "the hon. member for the Kakadua" had made the Colonial Treasurer pay for in his "Budget." The remembrance that they had not paid for it themselves comforted the Jerry's Towners a little when the bridge was whirled away, but it had scarcely ceased to be visible before they began to denounce the Government for squandering the "people's money" on scamped work like that, and the hon. member for Kakadua sank as rapidly in the opinion of his Jerry's Town constituents as the Kakadua

rose before their eyes. He was a "duffer," after all, they said, and only shammed to look after the "estimates."

But that was no time to go into politics. More than half of Jerry's Town was under water; and Jerry's Flats were a huge lake, with here and there a clump of trees, or a single tree-top, a chimney, a roof, a yard or two of fencing, or a tiny island of higher ground, showing above the troubled water. Dead horses, bullocks, sheep, pigs, poultry, and bush beasts and birds, little trees, big trees, rafts of branches and brushwood, great mats of withered grass and weeds, rushes and reeds, large clods of red earth, harness, furniture, bark roofs, slab and weather-board sides and fronts of huts and houses, verandah-posts, stray stacks, and wrecks of all kind, were everywhere tossing and jostling; but in the current of the river they were hurried on in such a grinding bumping mass that, even if the water had not run so rapidly, it would have been a most perilous

task to pull a boat across the stream. A boat or two did manage to cross it, however, thanks to bold clever steering, although they were whisked along like chips for a mile or so before they could get out of the current. Every boat left unswamped in Jerry's Town was out soon after daybreak on that Friday morning. The police-boat got away first, and it was queer to see it steering between the roofs that alone marked out the lower end of George Street, pulling right over the pound at the bottom of Pitt Street, and then giving a spurt into the open water across the drowned butcher's paddock. All the boats had adventures that, I think, would interest you but, of course, you guess that Harry and Donald formed part of a rescue party, and therefore I will tell you their adventures, as I heard them. partly from the boys, and partly from the men they went with.

Harry and Donald had begun to despair of getting afloat, because, of course, when crews

were made up, stronger arms than boys' were picked, and the boats had no room for outward-bound passengers, every inch of room being needed for the poor people they were going to rescue. But the Doctor had a ramshackle old four-oared tub, in which he sometimes pottered about in the creek by himself. It was rowing under difficulties, for the Doctor found it hard work to lug the heavy old literal "torpid" along, and every now and then he had to stop pulling, and set to work at baling. For some reason, however, the Doctor was very proud of his tub ; and, the instant the creek began to rise, he had her hauled up his garden, which sloped down to the creek, and laid up in ordinary in his verandah.

There she was lying when the boys came upon two men, who were looking at her somewhat disconsolately. One was the landlord of the "General Bourke," and the other was the Jerry's Town shoemaker.

"I doubt if she'd float, Tommy," said the landlord; "and besides, she hain't got ne'er a rudder."

"Oh, we could stuff summat in here and there," answered the shoemaker, "an' we could steer her better with a oar, an' some little cove will be game to bale."

Harry and Donald at once offered their services, but just then the Doctor came out.

"I'm willing to risk the boat," he said, "but I must pull stroke."

"No, Doctor, you must stay ashore," replied the landlord with a grin. "There's plenty as can pull a oar your fashion, but you're the only one than can do doctor's work. An' it ain't so much about risking the boat, as risking the lives of them as goes in her. Hows'ever, one o' these young coves from Wonga-Wonga will do to bale, an' then we only want two to pull and another to steer—that's three; an' surely there must be three men besides yourself, Doctor, in Jerry's

Town game enough to jine us, though it *ain't* much better than a sieve."

But such was the reputation of the Doctor's tub that the three were not forthcoming. Harry and Donald, however, were more eager than ever to embark.

"Do you know anything about a boat, boys?" asked Boniface solemnly, as if he was putting a question out of the Catechism.

"I should think we did," answered Harry, "a precious sight more than a good many of your Jerry's Town loafers; we've got a boat of our own at Wonga-Wonga."

"Ay, but can you do anything in her?"

"We can pull her, and steer her, and sail her," answered Harry, proudly; "I'm not bad in a oat, and Donald is better."

Boniface scratched his head for a minute in perplexity, and then said,

"Tommy and me will risk it, Doctor. We 'll cobble her up a bit, an' one on 'em can bale, an'

t'other try his hand at steerin', an' p'raps, at a pinch, both on 'em can pull a bit. Lawson ain't a bad sort. He won't mind us takin' his boys, will he, Tommy? Anyhow, I don't like to see anything that calls itself a boat a-doin' nothing, an' them poor critturs squealin' out yonder—good customers o' mine some on 'em is, ain't they, Tommy? So you come along, young gentlemen, if you're willin', an' we'll bring you back as sound as a roach, if you'll be sure to mind what I tell ye."

The boys were sharp enough to see that "Dutch courage" had something to do with the landlord's heroism, and with Tommy's too; but they could see also that the men could tell well enough what they were about; so, as soon as the boat had been hastily caulked with an old hat or two, and dragged and pushed down the few yards that then separated her from the water, off the four started. In spite of all they could do, however, their craft floundered about

in a very tublike fashion, and was nearly wrecked at starting against a hut flooded up to the bark eaves. The water eddied round this hut, and banged the boat up against it, and then, as soon as she was got off again, she ran foul of a floating Chinese hog, so swollen that it looked like a little hippopotamus; and next she was caught in a float of driftwood, and she had to run the gauntlet between all kinds of snags and sawyers. But at last she got away into more open water, and all four pulled with a will over the muddy, scummy waves towards a roof on which they fancied they could see some people clustered. It was the roof of a little farmhouse, and when the boat's crew reached it, they found the farmer clinging to the chimney, and waving his shirt as a signal of distress (he had *cooeyed!* until he had cracked his voice and was almost black in the face). His wife was crouching at his feet, doing her best to shelter her youngest girl against the still heavy rain; and the other poor little children were hud-



"THEY FOUND THE FARMER CLINGING TO THE CHIMNEY."—*Page 112.*



dled on the roof-ridge, like a row of draggle-tailed roosting fowls. It was hard work to get the boat alongside without staving her in, and still harder to get all the family on board without capsizing her; but all at length were safely embarked, and then the farmer said :

“There’s a poor thing out yonder with a kid—can’t we take her?” He pointed to a woman in her night-dress, up to her shoulders in water, on the top of an old honeysuckle, and holding her baby above the flood in her poor aching arms. But there was no room in the boat.

“We must come for her next trip,” said Boniface.

“The tree will be gone before then,” cried Donald; “we’ll stay on the roof here—won’t we, Harry?—and then you can come back for us when you’ve got the rest ashore.”

“No, that won’t do, will it, Tommy?” said the landlord; but the boys were quite positive, and said it was a currish thing to leave the woman

there, and that they would make a fuss about it, if the boat didn't go for her. Then the farmer said that, if anybody ought to stay, he supposed he ought to ; but he didn't seem very willing to stay, and his wife cried, and said that he ought to think of his children, if he didn't care for her ; and the boys settled matters by scrambling on to the roof.

“It warn't my doin's, mind,” growled Boniface, as the boat pulled off for the honeysuckle. The poor woman and her baby were saved, and only just in time. A few minutes after they were taken off, the tree flung up its roots as a diving duck flings up its feet. It was weary, dreary work for the boys to cling to the chimney, watching the boat pulling for the town, and waiting for it to come back for them. After all, it was not the landlord and the shoemaker who rescued them. Boniface and Tommy had worked off their “Dutch courage” in the first trip, and, besides, the Doctor's tub would certainly have foundered

if she had tried to make another. But the police-sergeant had heard the story, and he had helped to capture Warrigal in his private-trooper days, and had a great respect for Harry.

“We'll go first for that game young Trojan,” he said to his men ; and the farmer volunteered to take one policeman's place in the boat, that there might be no mistake about the house. Harry's heart, and Donald's too, gave a great leap of joy when they saw the police-boat steering as straight as it could for them, over the brown waters, through the grey rain. But, pleased as they were at getting on board the boat, they could think of others. They told the sergeant that they thought they had seen a fire and some people far away on a bit of dry ground.

“I'm out of my reckoning, now,” said Harry ; “but Donald thinks it must be the top of Macpherson's Hill, on the Cornwallis Road ; anyhow, Macpherson's inn has gone.”

“Give way, lads,” cried the sergeant ; and he

steered the long police-boat towards the spot his young passengers had pointed out. It was a long hard pull, and the boat took up other passengers before she got to the end of it. She took off a man from a shea-oak, and a woman and two children he had lashed to branches higher up. The man had been made quite stupid by the terrible time he had had. It was as much as two policemen could do to drag him off the branch to which he clung, and then he tumbled into the boat like a sack of sand. When the poor scratching, screaming woman was got into it, she had to be tied again, because she had gone mad. About half a mile farther on, the boat came to a hut flooded up to the eaves ; and "Whisht!" cried Donald (as if the rain and wind and chopping waves would mind him), "there's a body in there."

Nobody else had heard anything to show it, but the sergeant steered the boat alongside the roof, and then they all heard thumps against it, and muffled shouts of "Holy murther! Hooroo!"

Bad luck to ye!" They pulled the sheets of sodden bark off, and pulled out an old Irish shepherd, who had been bumping up against the rafters, astride upon a box, with a rum-bottle in his fist, like the publican's Bacchus on his barrel.

The water shoaled as the boat neared the top of Macpherson's Hill. On the sloppy ground a score or two of men, women, and children had congregated and had managed to light a fire. They had two or three pannikins and some bottles and quart pots amongst them, and were drinking and handing one another tea and grog in a strange, stupefiedly tranquil fashion. There were snakes on the little island also, but they were too scared to bite; and drenched native cats, and quail, and bush-rats, and swamp-parrots, and bandicoots, and diamond-sparrows, and lizards, and spiders, and scorpions, and green and yellow frogs, and centipedes, and praying Mantises, were muddled up in a very miserable "happy family."

As soon as the people on the little island saw that the boat grounded within a couple of yards of its brink, they woke up from their trance, and rushed into the water, clamorously demanding that either themselves, or somebody they cared for more than they did for themselves, should be carried off first. The sergeant had to make his men back water, and threaten to carry nobody, before he could quiet the poor bewildered creatures, made drunk by sudden hope. Then they, together with the Irish shepherd, were carried over by instalments to a point of undrowned land nearer than what remained above water of Jerry's Town (Harry and Donald meanwhile staying on the island, and tucking into the tea and stale damper given them, for they were as hungry and thirsty as hunters). Then the boat at last came back, and carried them to Jerry's Town, with the man and woman, and two scared shivering little children that had been taken off the shea-oak.

The rain did not cease until the following Thursday, and although, when it did cease, the flood went down almost as rapidly as it had risen, a fearful amount of damage had been done on and about Jerry's Flats. Several lives had been lost. Scores of acres had been washed away bodily, or smothered in white sand. Houses, huts, sheds, fences, had utterly vanished. The flooded buildings that had stood out the flood looked like sewers when the waters went down. A good many of the "cockatoo settlers" were temporarily ruined, and had to petition the Government, through the hon. member for the Kakadua, for seed-corn ; living, and re-making some kind of a home meanwhile, on the alms they got from the relief committees. But on the other hand, some of the river-side farms were made richer than ever by the shiploads of fat soil that had been left on them, and it was like magic to see how rapidly the bush, that had been as dry as a calcined bone a few days before,

became green again when the sun shone out once more.

“A nice climate yours is, isn’t it?” I said to Harry, when we were talking over our flood adventures.

“Look at the country now,” he retorted, triumphantly. “You couldn’t beat that in slow old England, where it’s always dribbling. It *does* rain here when it does rain, and then it’s over.”

“Hech, lad! we should be nane the waur o’ a little mair equal division,” commentated the more cautiously patriotic Donald, who talked mongrel Scotch when he became philosophical. “It wasna sae gey fine when we grippit the lum out yonder.”

VIII.

A BUSH GRAVE.

ONE day Harry and Donald had been sent a good way from home to drive in a small mob of cattle, to swell the large one which Mr. Lawson was mustering at Wonga-Wonga for another overland trip to Port Phillip. The shortest cut to where they expected to find the cattle was over a high ridge—so high that on the crest there were very few trees, and those very little ones, sheltering in hollows like sentries in their boxes. In winter snow lies on the ridge, but it was not winter then, and the boys and their horses both thought the air deliciously cool, and the short grass and tiny Alpine herbs deliciously

green, when they had scrambled up the rugged mountain-track, and stood panting on the top. A great ocean of dark wood, with here and there a shoal-like patch of flat or clearing, spread on all sides beneath them. Of course, the cattle were not to be driven home that way, but to be headed round a spur of the ridge that ran into the plain at its foot seven or eight miles off. An easy gully there ran through the range of hills. As the boys went down the ridge, however, they saw a mob of cattle, wild cattle, some turned, and some born so. The "Rooshians" stood stock-still for a minute, looking at the intruders with red angry eyes, as if they meditated a charge; but the boys cracked their stockwhips, and then off went the Rooshians, shaking the ground as they thundered along. The boys saw a little mob of wild horses, too—descended from stray tame ones, like the American mustangs. Only one of these, a mare, seemed ever to have been even nominally tame. There was just a trace of a brand on her off flank; but

the rest apparently had never had their skins scarred by a branding-iron, or their hoofs singed or cramped with a shoe. There were three or four mares in the mob, and a stallion, and a score or so of foals of different sizes. They were all as plump as plums, and yet they galloped off like the wind, with their long tails sweeping the ground, and their great curly manes tossing like waves about their necks and eyes.

A little farther down the boys came to a hollow full of kangaroo-grass, and a mob of mouse-coloured, deer-eyed kangaroo were camped in it. Some were nibbling the spiky brown grass, with their fore feet folded under them like hill sheep. Some were patting one another, and tumbling one another over like kittens. Others were watching in a ring two "old men" that were fighting. One of the boxers was a nearly grey "old man," with a regular Roman nose; the other was darker and younger, but nearly as tall, and so he did not intend to let old Roman-

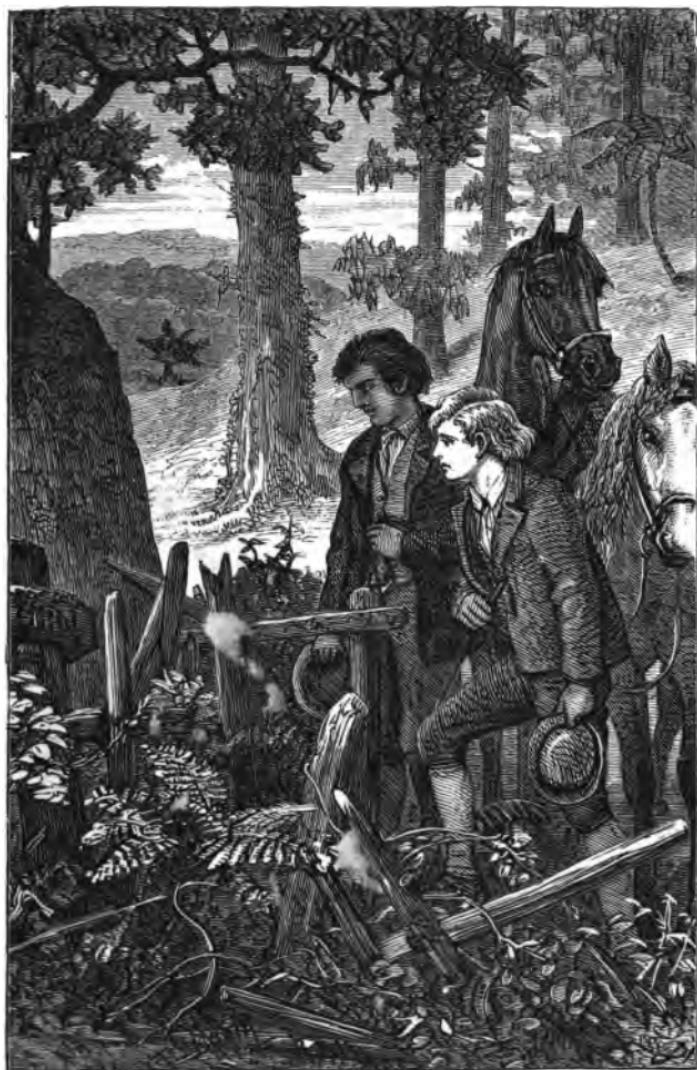
nose cock over him any more. The old does were looking on as if they hoped their contemporary would win, but the darkie seemed the favourite of the young "flying does." The two bucks stood up to each other, and hit out at each other, and tried to get each other's head "into chancery" in prize-ring style ; but sometimes they jabbered at each other, just like two Whitechapel vixens, and they gave nasty kicks at each other's bellies, too, with their sharp-clawed hind feet. They were so taken up with their fight that they let the boys watch it for nearly five minutes. When they found out, however, that they were being watched, they parted sulkily, and hopped off to "have it out" somewhere else, as fighting schoolboys slope when they see a master coming, or fighting street-boys when they see a policeman. After them hopped the rest of the mob, and Harry and Donald gave chase to one of the does. She had come back to pick up her "Joey." The little fellow jumped into her pouch head foremost

like a harlequin, and then up came his bright eyes and cocked ears above the edge of the pocket, and away Mrs. Kangaroo went with her baby. She tried hard to carry him off safe, but the boys had got an advantage over her at starting, and threatened to head her off from the rest of the mob. Into her apron-pocket went Mrs. Kangaroo's fore paw, and out came poor little Master Kangaroo. The mother was safe then, but it would have been easy to capture the fat, half-stunned baby. The boys, however, did not wish to encumber themselves with a pet, and, besides, they could not help pitying both the baby and his mamma. So they turned their horses' heads, and presently, when they looked back, they saw the doe watching them, and then bounding to pick up once more the Joey she had "dinged."

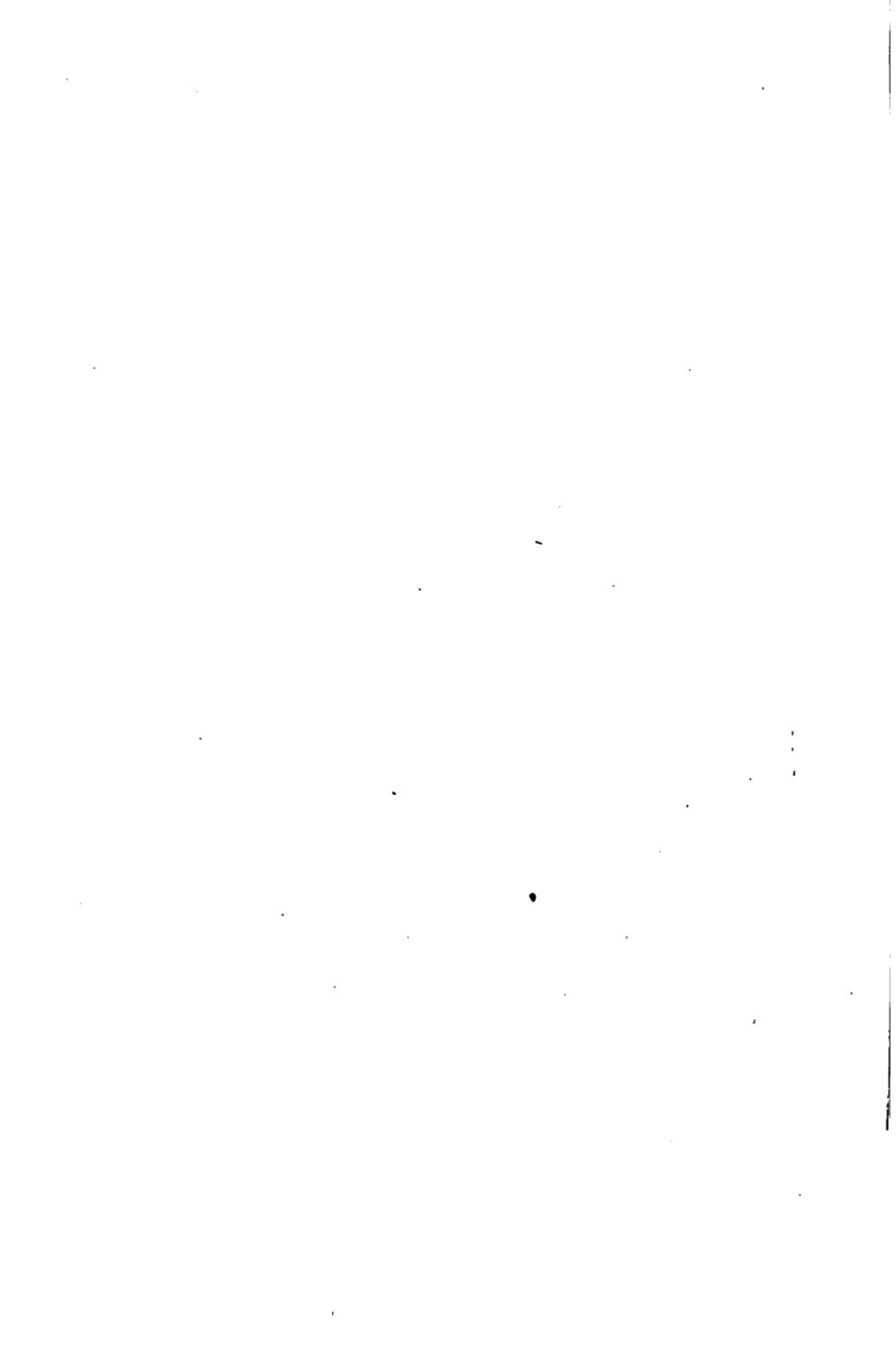
By-and-bye the boys came to the head of a fern-tree gully, and plunged into its moist, warm, dim, luxuriant jungle, overshadowed by gigantic

trees. Even what they call the "dwarf" tea tree ran up there to more than one hundred feet. They rode under blackwood trees, twenty feet round at the ground, and without a branch on the straight bole for eighty feet, beech trees two hundred feet high, and gum trees with tops twice as high as theirs. Huge creepers draped and interlaced those monsters. Some of the fern trees were more than fifty feet high, and above the feathery fans of the little ferns great stag-horns spread their antlers, and nest-ferns drooped their six-foot fronds. There were fragrant sassafras trees, too, in the gully, and the gigantic lily pierced the jungle with its long spear-shaft.

As the boys were forcing their way through it on their horses, with many a scratch and damp smack in the face from the swinging boughs, they came suddenly upon a little square of broken-down, almost smothered fencing. Inside there was more jungle, but a rough wooden cross showed them that they were looking at a bush grave.



"A ROUGH WOODEN CROSS SHOWED THEM A BUSH GRAVE." —*Page 126.*



Initials and a date had been rudely carved upon the cross, but an A and 8 were all that could be made out of them. The boys had never heard of any one buried there, and it made them very serious at first to find a forgotten grave in that lonely place. They got off their horses, and took off their hats, and stood looking at the grave for some minutes in silence. Then they mounted again, and rode on, feeling, until they got out of the gully, as if they had been at a funeral. They had other things to think about when they rode into the sunshine again. They had the cattle to look up, and a camping-place to pick, because they were not going back to Wonga-Wonga until next day. But when they sat by their fire in the evening, with the weird night-wind moaning in the bush and sighing through the scrub around them, their thoughts went back to the bush grave.

“*We* may die some day like that, Donald,” said Harry, “without a soul to know where we’re buried. It seems dreary somehow, don’t it?”

“Somebody maun hae kenned where that puir fellow was buried,” answered logical Donald, “because he couldna hae buried himsel’, and put that cross up, and cut his name on ‘t.”

“Ah, perhaps the other fellow murdered him,” cried Harry. “And yet he’d hardly have put the cross up, if he had. No, I expect there were two of them out going to take up new country, just as you and me may be out some day, and one of ‘em died. It must have been dreary work for the other chap then, and perhaps he died all by himself, and nobody knows what became of *him*.”

When the boys got back to Wonga-Wonga with their cattle, they made inquiries about the grave in the fern-tree gully, but no one else on the station had either seen it or heard of it before. Old Cranky, the men said, was the only one likely to know anything about it. The old man happened to come to Wonga-Wonga three days afterwards, and Harry at once began to question him

about the grave. At first Old Cranky seemed not to understand what he was being asked—then a half-sly, half-frightened look came into his face, and he said that he knew every foot of the Bush for many a mile anywhere thereabouts, and he was sure there wasn't a grave in it. Then he said he had never been in *that* gully; and then he said, Oh yes, he had, and there was a grave in it years back—he remembered now—why, it was an old mate of his—they had been lagged together and had cut away together, because the cove was such a Tartar, and Squinny had knocked up, and it was *he* who had buried him there, and put up a cross to keep the devil off. He remembered it now as if it had all happened yesterday.

“And is it up yet?” the old man went on. “My word! a A and a 8? Oh, the A was for Andrew—that was Squinny’s name—Andrew Wilson. Didn’t you see ne’er a W? I mind the knife slipped, an’ I cut my finger makin’ it. 8? Let’s

see—it was 18, summut 8, or was it 17? when I buried Squinny?"

And then Old Cranky burst out laughing, and said that he had been gammoning Harry all through—*he* knew nought about the grave, and didn't believe there was one. Harry had been spinning him a yarn, and so he had spun Harry one to be quits.

All this was very queer, but Old Cranky *was* so very queer that Harry didn't think much of it, coming from him. But when Harry told Donald about it, Donald looked very suspicious, and said,

"Anyhow, when we've a chance, we'll go and see whether there *is* a W on the cross. Where is Qld Cranky?"

"I left him yarning away in the horsebreaker's hut," answered Harry; but when the boys strolled down there, they found that Old Cranky had left the station without coming up as usual to the house. Two days afterwards he came back, and as soon as he saw Harry he called out,

"There, I knowed I was right. I've been all through yon gully, and there's no more a grave in it than there is in the back o' your hand. You goo an' look again—I'll goo with you, if ye like."

But when the boys did go back to the gully, it was without Old Cranky. They were not exactly afraid of him, but still they preferred the old snake-charmer's room to his company in such a place. They thought they could ride almost straight to the grave, but from top to bottom, and from side to side, they rode through and through the gully without finding again the broken fence and crumbling cross.

"We couldn't have been dreaming, Donald, could we?" asked Harry.

"Nay, lad," answered Donald, "but we shouldna hae let that auld scoon'rel get the start of us. We'll not see him at Wonga-Wonga again, in a hurry, I'm thinkin'."

But Old Cranky did turn up again there in a few weeks' time, and chuckled greatly when he

heard of the boys' unsuccessful hunt. That was his last visit to Wonga-Wonga. A short time afterwards he was found dead in the Bush, with his dogs standing over him, and his tame snakes wriggling about him. He had died of old age merely, and was buried in the Bush in which he had spent the greater part of his life. Old Cranky had been the "oldest inhabitant" in that part of the colony ; and when he was gone, people began to rake up old stories of the old convict times in which he had figured. One day a settler, to whose father Old Cranky had been assigned, was dining at Wonga-Wonga, and telling us what he remembered of the old lag.

"Had your father one Wilson ?" asked Donald.

"Well, really, he had so many, and it's so long ago, that I can't remember," said the gentleman.

"Was your father a Tartar ?" was Donald's next very rude question.

"I dare say he was," the son answered laugh-

ingly, "and he had need to be with such a set of scamps as he had to manage. If you hadn't kept your eye on them, and let them feel the weight of your hand now and then, they'd have been on you like caged tigers when they see the tamer's turning funky."

"If you can't remember a Wilson, can you remember a body that went by the name of Squinny?" persisted Donald, like a barrister; "and did he take to the Bush because he couldn't stand the floggings he got?"

"Squinny! You're right. I do remember a man of that name. No, he didn't take to the Bush. He was drowned crossing a creek—at least, that's what the fellow that was out with him said. By-the-bye, it was this very Old Cranky. But what do you know about him—what makes you ask?"

Then the boys told what they had seen and heard, and afterwards hadn't seen. Everybody at table, of course, came to the conclusion that

Wilson had met with foul play in the gully from Old Cranky, and then been buried there by him in the way he had described.

“If you could find the grave,” said the settler, “I’ll be bound you’d find a cracked skull in it; but of course the old rascal cleared away all tracks of the fence and the rest of it, when Harry put him up to what he’d seen. Besides, what would be the good of finding out anything? You can’t hang the old villain now, and, if he was alive, you’d have hard work to bring the thing home to him. The little I remember, and what he told the boys, is about all the evidence you’d have, and really I don’t remember much, and the old scoundrel was always cranky. Besides, candidly, I don’t see that it would do much good to scrag one villain for knocking another on the head all those years ago. The fellow would have been dead by this time somehow, and perhaps Old Cranky did society a good turn in finishing him off when he did. What do *you* think, Mr.

Howe? I think, for my part, that a good many fellows that could be very well spared have been settled in that way in the colony; just as the ants, they say, eat up the rats and the cock-
roaches. The curious thing is, that Old Cranky should have taken so much trouble to bury the man decently, with the name and date, and all the rest of it, and then forgotten all about it. But he was always a comical coon, was Old Cranky. A native wouldn't have done a silly thing like that, Mr. Howe. We're up to time of day; ain't we, Harry?"

"Anyhow, we're a deal better than the English, though I didn't know *you* called yourself a native," answered Harry. "We shouldn't have any scamps in the colony if it wasn't for the lot they sent us out from home; though, after all, the old hands are twice the men the new chums are that come nowadays. A set of stuck-up milksops! They don't know anything, and they can't do anything, and yet they talk as if they'd done the

colony a great honour in coming to it, to be always growling at it because they ain't 'cute enough to get on here."

Harry and Donald did not make their appearance at the Wonga-Wonga dinner-table next day. They had started early in the morning for the fern-tree gully, with a pick and a spade, determined to make one more effort to discover the grave and unravel its mystery.

For a long time their hunt was as fruitless as before, but at last Harry cried out,

"I'm almost certain it was somewhere here! Don't you remember there was a blue gum close by, with a hole that looked like a black fellow grinning, half-way up? There's the tree—or else it's the image of it, and I never saw two trees exactly alike before."

Donald got off his horse, and poked about in the scrub for some time. Presently he said, "Ye're richt." He had been trying the ground with the handle of the pick, and it had run into

seven loosely filled-up, hard-sided and hard-bottomed holes, arranged like this :



“Don’t ye see ?” said Donald, pointing out the outside ones ; there’s where the posts stood, and this inside one is where the cross stood. The auld villain didn’t dig up the bones, though, if there *are* any bones, for the earth hasn’t been stirred anywhere else.”

The boys set to work with a will, and about five feet below the surface they came to a rusty-yellow crumbling skeleton. There was nothing in the look of the bones from which the boys, at any rate, could tell how their owner had met his death. But they dug up also what turned out to have been a white bone-handled pocket knife, when they had washed off the earth that encrusted it. The blades were almost eaten up by

rust ; the handle was the colour of bad teeth, and the rivets fell out, and it dropped asunder as the boys handled it ; but on one of the sides was cut —“Andrew Wilson.”

The boys put back the bones, and filled in the earth again, and knocked up a rude fence once more round the grave. The sun went down as they were finishing their task, and before they got out of the gully the huge funguses at the foot of the shadowy trees were gleaming like lucifer-matches in the dark, and the curlews were wailing most dolefully. Both boys were very glad to ride out where there was nothing between them and the clear starry sky.

“I wouldn’t camp in there for a thousand pounds,” said Harry, looking back at the deep wooded gorge ; and even Donald confessed that the place seemed “nae canny.”

IX.

THE OLD CONVICT TIMES.

THE settler who remembered Old Cranky's antecedents was Mr. Walter Daventry, son of a deceased Captain Daventry, who had moved up into the Kakadua district from the sea-coast, where he had first made himself a home. If I tell you something about Mr. Walter's boyhood, you will get a notion of Australia in the old convict times. This Captain Daventry was a military settler. When Mrs. Daventry, and her son Walter, and her maid Phœbe, went out from England to join the captain on his grant, both mistress and maid thought they were never to know what

comfort was again—that they were going, so to speak, to the world's back-yard, in which all kinds of dirty rubbish were shot. Walter would have preferred India or Canada; people teased him so when they learnt that he was going to "Botany Bay"—asking him when he was sentenced to transportation—how many years he had got—and a good many more such silly questions, which they thought a great deal wittier than Walter did. Still, any change was acceptable that would take him away from the dull little Norfolk town that never seemed thoroughly awake, and its dark, long, low-pitched grammar-school, in which two masters, in cap and gown, nodded over their far-apart desks, and pretended to teach Walter and another small boy, and tried to fancy that they were preparing a lanky hobby-dehoy for the University. Masters, hobbydehoy, and small boy all half-envied Walter, in a drowsy kind of way, when one morning he burst into that gloomy old school-room to say good bye.

An hour afterwards he was rattling out of the dreamy little town along the Ipswich road, *en route* for London. The coachman was making his leaders and the off-wheeler canter, the guard was *tootle-toeing* on his horn; the townspeople stood at their doors and the inn gates, sleepily watching the coach that had come from great Norwich and was going to still greater London, and sleepily waving their hands to proud Walter, who had begged for an outside place, instead of being shut up in the stuffy inside with Mamma and Phœbe and an old gentleman, who wore a bandana under his fur travelling-cap, and got out for refreshment at every inn at which the coach stopped to change horses, munching ham sandwiches and drinking cold brandy and water almost without intermission when the coach was in motion. Walter had a much pleasanter companion in the coachman, behind whom he sat, and who told him stories about the gentlemen's seats they passed, and gave him the biographies

of all the horses, and even let him hold the reins sometimes, when Mr. Jehu got down at a roadside house to deliver a parcel or drink a glass of ale. Walter enjoyed the first part of the journey exceedingly, but he was very tired and sleepy before it was over.

As the coach swung through Mile End turnpike, the coachman woke him up with a back thrust of the butt-end of his whip, and said,

“Now, then, squire, you can reckon yourself in London.”

Walter just opened his heavy eyes, and then shut them again—not thinking much of the Great City, if *that* was London. By the time the coach got to its inn, he was so sound asleep again that a waiter had to carry him up to bed. The ride from Norfolk to London, however, was flying on eagles’ wings compared with the voyage from London to Sydney. In those days the magnificent steamers and sailing clippers that now arrive almost daily at or from Australia had not been

dreamt of. At long intervals clumsy old tubs of ships and barques sailed for the far-off southern land, pottered about for months at sea, and at last turned up at the Antipodes, seemingly more through good luck than good management. The barque in which our party sailed was named the *Atalanta*. Walter had often read through the proper names at the end of his Latin dictionary, and was greatly amused by the barque's flying name when he found how she crawled. She had to put in at Plymouth, Lisbon, Bona Vista, Rio, and the Cape. She was just half a year and half a month in getting from the Nore to Port Jackson Heads.

Once inside the Heads, however, even Mrs. Daventry and Phœbe picked up a little spirit, and Walter was in ecstasies. Both sky and water were so brightly blue, the islands sprinkled on the water looked so pretty, and, though the trees seemed almost as black as ink to English eyes, the rocky, wooded shores, sweeping down to the

little coves and bays, beached with white sand that shone like silver under the glowing sun, had a fairyland-like look. Sydney then had not the fine buildings it boasts of now, but the town was so much more civilized in appearance than Mrs. Daventry and Phœbe expected, and the little country houses, that even then had begun to dot the south side of the harbour, were such darling little nests, that both mistress and maid fell in love with Sydney. Captain Daventry came on board as the *Atalanta* let go her anchor in Sydney Cove. He was very brown, and he had a long curly beard. He was dressed more lightly than he would have been at home, but still he *was* dressed, and like a gentleman. A horrid load was lifted from Mrs. Daventry's mind, since she had half given in to Phœbe's belief that Master would only wear a bit of 'possum or kangaroo skin about his loins, and that he would carry a spear instead of a walking-stick. As for Walter, he was very proud of the brown manly-looking

Papa whom he had not seen since he was almost a baby.

“Oh, Walter,” cried Mrs. Daventry to her husband, when the kissing was over, “I hope your farm is close by. I used to think that they sent the convicts out here because it was a hideously ugly hole, but this is a love of a place.”

“It’s nicer to look at than to live in,” the captain answered. “What with convicts and emancipists, you’d soon be sick of living in Sydney. No, my grant is some miles up-country. There’s a nasty swarm of ticket-of-leavers round it, but, of course, you’ll have nothing to do with them. And then there are some good fellows of our sort within reach—some of them married, too. What a time you’ve been! I was down two months ago looking out for you. It’s quite by chance I’m down now. However, there’ll be room on the dray for your luggage, if you haven’t brought out a ship-load, and we’ll start home to-morrow, if one night will be rest enough for you. I’ve

been buying some horses, and you and Walter can ride two of them, and help me to drive the rest. You'll be better off than you were before you married me, old lady. You had only one horse then, but I can give you your pick out of a dozen or two now. Of course Walter has learnt to stick on a horse somehow, though you couldn't keep a pony for him? The girl will have to learn to ride, too, if she wants to get about up-country. In the meantime she can go up on the dray. The bullock-driver is an assigned servant, but he's as true as steel, and that's more than I can say for some of the beggars I've got."

But when the loaded dray was brought to the inn door next morning, with a chair on it for Phœbe, she had learnt that assigned servant meant convict, and refused at first to take her seat. She wasn't going to have her throat cut with her eyes open, she screamed. The bullock-driver, Long Steve, was a good-tempered fellow, and did his best to calm her.

"Why, law bless ye, miss," he said, "I 've got an old 'ooman an' half a dozen kids. What call have I got to do any harm to a pretty gal like you?"

But flattery was thrown away on Phœbe. She entreated her mistress not to leave her to the tender mercies of that wicked-looking man, and made such a fuss that at last her master was obliged to say,

"Well, look here, Phœbe. If you don't go in the dray, you must either stay in Sydney, or walk, or ride one of the horses. Take your choice—which shall it be?"

Phœbe mounted the dray then, and though it was night when she reached her journey's end, she was on quite good terms with Long Steve when he helped her off the dray. She had been talking to him for hours, half condescendingly, half propitiatingly, thinking all the time what a capital adventure it would be to relate in her first letter home. In that letter Phœbe made

out that Long Steve had committed half a dozen murders, whereas the honest fellow had never committed one. A great many terrible scamps were sent out to Australia in the old convict times, but, mixed up with them, there were men who were far better fellows than many of the people left at home.

Late in the afternoon the Captain and his party reached his farm. "Oh, what a first-rate broad!" Walter, fresh from Norfolk, exclaimed, when the riders had mounted the top of the shore-hills, and were looking down on the lagoon which the farm fringed—a lagoon with thickly-wooded banks, cleared here and there, a little stream running into it at one end, and at the other a sandy bar over which the sea was breaking.

Mrs. Daventry was delighted at first with her new home. A pretty flower-garden sloped down to the lagoon, and the verandah of the snug one-storey house of brick and weather-board

was smothered in passion-flower. The Captain had furnished the house as comfortably as he could for his wife, and altogether it seemed a much smarter, livelier place than the dark old house in the dull, grass-grown side-street of the little Norfolk town where she had been economizing whilst her husband was first doing military duty, and afterwards building this snug nest in New South Wales. There was no need, apparently, to economize now. Beef and mutton were the commonest of things at Daventry Hall. Cream, butter, eggs, honey, pigs, poultry, fish and game were all to be got, to almost any extent, upon the premises. Besides English vegetables, there were pumpkins and sweet potatoes in the kitchen garden. There was a nice vineyard, which Walter mistook at first for a field of currant-bushes; and in the orchard there were raspberries and strawberries and mulberries, pears and pomegranates, figs and plums and loquats, oranges and lemons, peaches, apricots and nec-

tarines, and gigantic rock and water melons. Walter thought of the scanty pennyworths of sour apples that he used to get in Norfolk, and for a week or two devastated the orchard and the vineyard like a 'possum or a flying-fox. As soon as it was known that Mrs. Daventry had arrived, the Captain's friends and their wives rode over to Daventry Hall, and then there was a round of dinners at the friends' houses, and then the Captain gave dinners in return, and both Mrs. Daventry and Phoebe were delighted with the gaiety. But when things settled into every-day course, and, as often happened, Captain Daventry was away from home for hours together, they both began to fall back into their old dread of Australia. Mrs. Daventry had been proud at first of having so many servants inside and outside the house, but it was not pleasant to remember that all except Phœbe were convicts. Captain Daventry was a strict, but then not a severe master, and so he got on pretty well with

his assigned servants, but in all their faces—except Long Steve's and his wife's—there was a shallow, time-serving look, however cringingly civil they might be, that was not assuring.

Walter did not trouble himself about such things. He made friends after a fashion with the men, and rode about with his father to look after the horses, and cattle, and sheep ; the maize-paddock and the potato fields ; the clearers, the fencers, and the sawyers. His father soon let him go about by himself, and then he *was* a proud and happy boy. He could scarcely believe that only a year ago he was stumbling through the irregular and defective verbs in that gloomy old Norfolk school-room. Walter could leap logs now far better than he could conjugate *Fio* or *Inquam* then. Of course, his father or his mother gave him lessons every now and then, but that was not like regular school, you know. Long Steve had taught him to crack a stock-whip, and Long Steve's wife had plaited him a cab-

bage-tree hat (in those days the lagoon was studded with cabbage-tree palms), and Walter used to gallop through the bush like a Wild Huntsman on his own three-parts blood chestnut Dragon-fly. Sometimes he went out on foot with his little gun, and after a bit he managed to shoot wallabies and kangaroo-rats, and quail and snipe, and bronze-wings, and parrots and cockatoos to make pies of. Sometimes, too, he took his gun out with him in the boat, and shot wild duck, and now and then a black swan, on the lagoon. In the lagoon and the little river, moreover, he caught eels and schnappers, and guard-fish, and so-called bream, and mullet and trout, and delicious oysters. The Captain was very proud of the way in which his little boy took to the colony, but Mrs. Daventry was very anxious because he was out so much alone.

One day, when the Captain and Walter rode home, they found Mrs. Daventry and Phœbe almost dead with alarm. A party of blacks had

taken possession of the front verandah, on which they were jabbering and gesticulating—rubbing their sides and poking their fingers down their throats. Poor Mrs. Daventry and her servant thought that these were signs that the blacks wanted to eat *them*, and therefore were ready to faint from fear. The Captain soon bundled the black fellows off the verandah, but he made it a point of policy to be kind to them, and so he ordered the cook to supply them with tea and damper and mutton chops. They ate and drank until even they could eat and drink no more, and then remarking, with great self-satisfaction, that they had “budgeree big belly,” they drowsily tramped into the bush, and lay down in the sun to sleep off their surfeit.

The black fellows were not grateful to the Captain for his kindness. Unfortunately, they had tasted his potatoes, and thought them so nice that they twice saved him the trouble of digging up his crop, and once even scooped out

and baked his seed-potatoes. The Captain did not want to make enemies of the darkies, but he was obliged after that to give up supplying them with chops and damper, except when they had fairly earned them by working for them.

Far worse thieves than the black fellows, however, persistently preyed on Daventry Hall.

All the assigned servants, except Long Steve and his wife, were habitual thieves. They did not get any wages for their work, and so they thought themselves free to help themselves to their master's property. So many pounds of salt or fresh meat and flour, so much coarse brown sugar and inferior tea, and a little tobacco, were the rations served out to each man every week; but there was good living in the men's huts for all that. China pigs, ducks, turkeys, &c., mysteriously disappeared. The men made out that they had wandered into the bush, and been devoured by bush beasts and birds, or else starved to death; but if Captain Daventry had gone to the huts a

little more frequently, instead of trusting, as he did, to his overseer, the savoury scent that often issued from them would have told him what had become of his poultry, &c. Walter noticed the savoury steam one evening, but the overseer said that he had shot some wild ducks, and given them to the men. The overseer was a convict—a smooth-faced, smooth-tongued rascal. He was trusted to weigh out the rations, and the men used to carry a good deal besides their rations out of the store. The house servants, too, whenever they had a good opportunity, would appropriate unguarded valuables. They had no difficulty in disposing of them, since all the assigned servants, except Long Steve and his wife, were in league with the ticket-of-leave farmers round about. Most of these ticket-of-leavers were a thieving, drunken lot. Some of them would reconvey their Government grants for a keg of rum. As for conveyance of another kind—Pistol's—they did not rob one another, but gen-

lemen-settlers they considered fair game. Captain Daventry's bullocks found their way into the ticket-of-leavers' beef-casks. They stole his best horses ; they clapped their brands on his best colts, fillies, and calves ; they pastured their own horses and cattle on his grant ; through the villainy of his overseer and convict shepherds, they robbed him of his sheep wholesale. They had even the impudence to steal Dragon-fly !

“Why, Daventry,” said one of the Captain’s friends one day, “what made you sell that capital chestnut your little fellow used to ride ? He fetched a good price, though, I believe.”

“*I* didn’t sell him,” answered the Captain, moodily ; “he was stolen. A nice lot of neighbours we’ve got ; however, I think I’ve scared ‘em for one while.”

When Dragon-fly was first missing, the overseer had comforted Walter by telling him that his horse could only have strayed a little way into the bush, and was sure to turn up soon. Mounted

on another nag, Walter rode about for days in search of his favourite, but never saw him more. Walter found out something, however. He was riding home very dispiritedly one evening, when he noticed Black Poley—as one of his father's shepherds who lived at an out-station was nicknamed, from the resemblance his head bore to a hornless bullock's—mounting the rise on the right of the gully in which Walter was riding. Walter could not understand what Poley was doing there at that time of night, and having been made suspicious by the loss of his horse, he pressed after Poley as quietly as he could. By the time he topped the ridge it was nearly dark, but he could make out Poley going down the other side of the ridge, and another man coming up to meet him. Walter was a brave little fellow. He tied his horse to a tree, and, slipping down the ridge, got within earshot of the two men, who were sitting, smoking and talking, on a fallen tree-trunk.

“Well, Poley, how many can you let me have this time?”

Poley gave a gruff laugh, and answered with an oath : “—— if I don’t try it on with three score! The cove is so jolly green, it’s my belief he ’ll never miss ’em. I began with twos an’ threes, an’ now I have worked it up to a score, and I’ve al’ays got over the cove somehow. What does sich as him know about sheep an’ farmin’? — if I don’t try *four* score—good yows, too ; so you must stand something handsome.”

“To-morrow morning then, at the old place—Sal’s Pannikin.”

“All right! I ’ll work round there about an hour after sunrise.”

Then something was said about the overseer ; but what, Walter could not make out. Not waiting to hear any more, he crept back to his horse, mounted, galloped home, and told his father what he had heard. At first the captain was going to consult with the overseer ; but one or two little

things recently had rather shaken his confidence in the overseer, and so he sent for Long Steve instead. Long Steve knew Sal's Pannikin well. It was a lonely hollow in an unoccupied part of the bush, and was called Sal's because on its brink a Mrs. Sarah Mullins had once kept a most disreputable sly drinking-house. Strange goings on had taken place there. At last the landlady had been brutally murdered in her own house, and after that it was allowed to go to ruin, and had the reputation of being haunted.

"What was the other man like, Master Walter?" asked Long Steve.

Walter could only say that he talked very much as if he had a hot potato in his mouth.

"Oh, that's little Dick Green, at the head of the lagoon," cried Long Steve, half disappointed at not having found a worthier foeman. "It's hard, Cap'en, if you an' me can't nab little Dick Green an' the Poley."

"Would you like to go, Walter?" said the

Captain. "I think it's only fair that you should see the fun."

Of course Walter wanted to go. So it was arranged that Steve should have tea and chops ready, and three horses saddled, at his hut (which stood apart from the other men's), and call his master and Walter at half-past two next morning. The Captain thought it advisable to start thus early, in case the sheep-stealers should have changed their minds after Walter left them, and agreed to meet at an earlier hour for safety's sake.

Walter greatly enjoyed his early breakfast by the wood fire in Long Steve's hut, and the silent ride through the bush—all three armed. But when they had put up their horses in Sal's ruined stables, and were crouching in Sal's roofless parlour, on the cracked hearthstone of which a frog was croaking dolefully, the adventure did not seem quite so jolly to Walter.

But presently, while it was still quite dark, a

light came dancing down the other side of the hollow. Long Steve sallied out to reconnoitre. When he came back he said,

“Yes, it’s little Dick, sure enough, busy finishing off his brush-hurdles. He’ll soon ha’ done, and then you and me, Cap’en, had better creep down to the fold whilst it’s yet dark. Master Walter can stay here with the horses, and bring ‘em down when we *cooey*. Oh, yes, Cap’en, he’ll be safe enough. Neither Dick nor the Poley would set a foot in here if you’d give them a thousand pounds.”

In spite of this assurance, Walter wearied of his lonely vigil.

At length the eastern sky brightened, the laughing-jackasses hooted out their hideously hilarious morning chorus, and the sun came up, bronzing the scrub and the tree-tops. Walter could see Dick quite plainly now. He was lying on the ground smoking his pipe. Then came another weary watch, but at last up started little

Dick and went to meet Black Poley, who was coming down to the Pannikin with the stolen sheep. They were all driven into the fold, and the two thieves were quietly talking together, when, as it seemed to Walter, from beneath their very feet the Captain and Long Steve jumped up like Jacks-in-the-box. The Captain felled Black Poley as if he had been indeed a bullock. Long Steve laid little Dick on his back as if he had been a child of four years old. By the time Walter had obeyed the cooey and galloped down with the horses, both thieves had their arms strongly bound behind them with green hide. With strips of the same they were fastened to the Captain's and Long Steve's stirrups, and then driving the ewes before them, the three thief-takers set out for home. As Long Steve had expected, they found the rest of the flock on the other side of the ridge that sloped down into Sal's Pannikin.

The overseer turned as white as a sheet when

his master rode up to Daventry Hall with his sheep and his prisoners, but neither Dick nor the Poley peached.

Black Poley was sentenced to an awful flogging before he was sent back to Sydney, and little Dick got ten years in a chain-gang. The Captain thought now that his property would be safe for a while, but he was utterly mistaken. He had only weeded out two scoundrels, whose places were almost instantly supplied by two at least as bad ; he had managed to focus the hatred of the district on himself, and, moreover, just then Hook-handed Bill and his gang came on circuit, so to speak, to the country round the lagoon. They had made their last *habitat* rather too hot to hold them, and with secure hiding-places in the range of shore-hills, they promised themselves some rich raids on the gentlemen-settlers who were dotted here and there around the lagoon.

Hook-handed Bill was a bushranger, without any of the redeeming qualities which a certain

set of story-tellers are so fond of giving to robbers. He was a greedy, savage brute. Physically he was a left handed-giant, who owed his *sobriquet* to the fact that he had lost his right hand, and supplied its place with a sharp hook. Horrid tales were told of what that hook had done ; “ripping up” was Hook-handed Bill’s favourite mode of murder. Burning alive in a bullock’s hide stood next in his estimation. It was said, too, that he was in the habit of waylaying bullock-drivers on their way down to Sydney with their masters’ wool, of shamming to be on the best of terms with them, and then murdering them wholesale in their sleep, afterwards disposing of the wool through the agency of some of his ticket-of-leave friends.

Such a villain, with half a dozen followers only not quite so bad as himself, was no pleasant bush neighbour. Some of the gentlemen-settlers sent their wives and children into Sydney. All rode about armed by day, and at night had their most

valuable cattle driven into the stockyards, and their favourite horses into the stables, whilst their houses were turned into little forts. In spite of all precautions, the bushrangers committed the most impudent robberies, and though some of the gentlemen-settlers assisted the policemen in hunting the robbers, no capture was made.

One afternoon, when Walter was in a lonely part of his father's grant, a huge, shaggy-bearded, roughly-clad fellow sprang from behind a clump of trees, and seized him by the collar. The stranger's right arm had no hand, but brandished a sharp hook, and Walter thought that his last hour was come. He was awfully frightened, but he tried not to seem so.

“Let me say my prayers first,” said Walter.

Hook-handed Bill gave a grin which was even more hideous than his habitual frown, as he answered,

“Time enough, youngster. I ain’t a-goin’ to kill you afore night. I want you to take a message

to your —— father. He 's a deal too cocky for my taste, is the Captain, flogging his men, and lagging his neighbours, and now he 's been boasting that he 'll take me dead or alive. Will he ? We 'll soon see who 's master. I 'll show him how much I care for his blowing. You take him Hook-handed Bill's compliments, and tell him that I give him fair warning that I mean to pay him a visit to-night, and to half-flog the life out of him and his sneak of a bullock-driver, and then to string 'em both up—an' you, too, you —— young spy!—an' to carry off the womenfolk he 's brought from —— Old England to look down on their betters. There ! you be off, youngster ! ”

At first the Captain was inclined to treat the bushranger's threat as mere bravado.

“ However,” he added, “ if the rascal does choose to come, he could not have consulted my convenience better. The police are coming over to-night, Walter, my boy. We meant to have given the bushrangers a hunt to-morrow morn-

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ing, but if they like to save us the trouble, so much the better. Don't say anything to your mamma, but go and call Long Steve."

The bullock-driver was firmly convinced that Hook-handed Bill would keep his word, and advised his master to begin his preparations at once, in case the bushrangers should hear from some of their scouts of the intended police visit, and resolve to rush the house before the arrival of the constables. Accordingly guns, pistols, ammunition, a sword, a cutlass, and a bayonet were got in readiness by the Captain—not that he really believed that there would be any use for them that night. The kitchen clock struck seven—eight—nine, and still the constables did not come. A little after nine the convict house-servants went away to their huts, and Long Steve carefully bolted the doors after them. Mrs. Daventry and Phœbe were persuaded to go to bed. The garrison of three sat in silence—the Captain expecting every moment to hear

the police ride up ; Long Steve and Walter, on the other hand, dreading the arrival of the bushrangers. About ten a party of men *were* heard galloping up.

“ There they are ! ” cried the Captain, and before Long Steve could stop him, he had opened the front door and run down to the garden-gate. “ Why, what a time you ‘ve been, Saunders,” the Captain shouted to the supposed police-sergeant.

“ Have we ? ” growled back a gruff voice. “ Well, we ‘ll try to make up for lost time, you —— ! ”

Discovering his mistake, the captain fired his pistol at the speaker, and rushed back to the house. A hailstorm of lead soon rattled on the weatherboards, and Mrs. Daventry and Phœbe got up and rushed about like maniacs. The women’s screams were not calculated to improve the Captain and Long Steve’s aim, and though they had the advantage of cover, and Walter to load for them, and of the moon which came up

presently, seven to two are heavy odds. (The overseer and assigned servants said next morning that they had been sound asleep—one, indeed, had heard a little firing, but thought that it was the Captain out duck-shooting !) I am afraid that the besiegers would have been the victors, had not a party of the Captain's friends suddenly made their appearance. They had been dining together about ten miles off, and a drunken convict had let out in their hearing the intended attack on Daventry Hall. They had instantly rushed to horse, and galloped the ten miles at racing speed. The bushrangers turned tail when the new-comers poured a volley into them. Five of the scoundrels, altogether, had been hit, but only one was taken. When the prisoner was escorted to the nearest police-barracks next day, the reason of the constables' non-appearance at Daventry Hall the night before was discovered.

The escort were very much astonished to find no one at the barrack gates, or in the barrack-

yard. They were still more astonished to find the sergeant and his men lashed down on the mess-room floor—all gagged, pinioned, and fettered.

Hook-handed Bill had been fully aware of the Captain's arrangements with the police, and had taken them by surprise in their lonely barracks before he dispatched his insolent message by Walter.

Although the bushranger had been beaten off, he and his ticket-of-leave allies continued to harass Captain Daventry. They did it to such an extent—cruelly hamstringing and mutilating cattle and horses when they did not choose to take the trouble to steal them—that Captain Daventry soon found that he was losing money fast. Being a soldier, however, he thought it would be disgraceful to give in to such “a lot of vermin,” but Mrs. Daventry declared that she could not live any longer in constant fear of her own life and her husband's. The Captain could face

bushrangers, but he could not stand hysterics. The Kakadua was then "outside"—as the colonists used to call unsettled districts—but Mrs. Daventry was willing to go thither when she found that bushrangers did not think it worth their while to visit the district. The Captain took up some good land on both banks of the river, and there—soured by his experiences—he became the Tartar his son owned that he had been.

X.

PIONEERING.

WHEN Sydney Lawson left home to take up new country for himself, there happened to be no tutor at Wonga-Wonga, and so Harry and Donald were allowed to go with the young squatter, both to keep them out of mischief and to enlarge their "colonial experience." Besides, they would be of as much use as, at least, a man and a half. The boys were away for months, but they never grew tired of their long holiday, although they often had to work hard enough in it. It was the thought that they were doing real man's work, and yet holiday-making at the same time, that made the holiday so jolly.

Just after sunrise one calm bright morning, the little expedition started — Sydney, Harry, Donald, and King Dick-a-Dick's heir-apparent, "Prince Chummy," on horseback, and in charge of a small mob of horses and another of cattle, and two old hands in charge of the bullock-dray that carried the baggage, stores, tools, nails, horseshoes, arms, ammunition, &c. "Jawing Jim" and "Handsome Bob" were the *sobriquets* by which these two old hands were known—both given on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, since Jim scarcely ever opened his mouth, and Bob was nearly as black, and not nearly so good-looking, as Prince Chummy. Jim was a Staffordshire man, and Bob was a Cockney. They were both good bushmen, but they had both been sent out for burglary, and therefore they may seem to have been strange guards for the commissariat-waggon, though the spirit-cask *had* another cask outside it as a precaution against furtive tapping. But for one thing, they were pretty well under

the eye of the rest of the party ; and for another, each watched the other like duplicated Japanese officials. There was a long-standing rivalry between them. Each sneered at the other's home exploits. When Jem did open his lips to any one except his bullocks, it was generally to launch some sarcasm at Bob, but in a tongue-fight he was rarely a match for the ugly Londoner, whose lonely bush life had not cured him of his Cockney glibness.

All the Wonga-Wonga-ites mustered to see the little party off—Mr. Lawson riding with it for a mile or two. There was a little confusion at starting. A young imported bull strolled up, angrily snuffing and pawing, as if jealous of the superior size of the bullocks ; and just as they had begun to obey Jim's very strong language and oft-cracked long whip, the little bull took a mean advantage, made a mad flank charge on the middle yoke, and threw the whole line into disorder. Thereupon Bob, who had made himself

comfortable on the flour-sacks in the dray, began to chaff his comrade, in his own elegant style, on his clumsiness.

“Call *yourself* a bullock-driver?” Bob was saying, when an old shoe that Mrs. Jones had thrown after Harry hit Bob in the face.

He was going to abuse Mrs. Jones then, but Jim growled out,

“Doan’t get inta a scoat, lahd! It hit thee wheer tha ken’t be hoort,” and Handsome Bob had to subside into his flour-sack couch again, silenced for once.

With much cracking of whips, trampling of hoofs, clanking of chains, jingling of tin pots, grinding of wheels, and creaking of pole and yokes, the expedition at last fairly got under way. We watched it go down the rise, across the flat, and through the slip-panels that led into the bush beyond; and then, when we could see nothing but the dust above the tree-tops, Mrs. Lawson and Mrs. M’Intyre, who was visit-

ing at Wonga-Wonga, went into their bed-rooms—perhaps to pray for their boys' safety.

I saw them start, but can only relate their adventures from what I heard of them when the boys came back.

The settled country through which they passed would have seemed wild enough to most English people, accustomed to hedged-in little fields, fitting like patches in a patchwork quilt, with roads and lanes curving between them, and railways running over them in the most rural places. In this "settled country" there were miles without a fence, and our pioneers generally camped out at night; although, when they came to a public, or an "accommodation-house," with a paddock, about sundown, they would have a night between sheets for a change, and when they chanced to halt near a head-station at nightfall, they could make sure of hearty hospitality, although not always of a bed. As they went on, the country seemed wilder and wilder to their

eyes, although perhaps we should not have seen much difference.

When I went out to New South Wales, I expected, from what I had read in guide-books, to see capital convict-made roads running through the colony everywhere. What I found was a tolerable bit of road reaching as far as Parramatta (not twenty miles from Sydney), but beyond that there was nothing that we should call a road in England. Deep ruts running right across the road ; grey logs that the mail-cart used to bump over, and black jagged tree-stumps that it used to graze against ; the smoothest bits of road like a ploughed field ; unbridged creeks ; "corduroy" causeways of tree-trunks across swampy places ;—that is what I remember of Australian up-country roads in dry weather ; and in wet weather they were chains of ponds, with marsh that swallowed you to the ankle, and bog that gobbled you above the knee, intervening ; and bogged blue-bloused dray-drivers sitting

here and there on the tops of their loads of wool-bales, smoking in sullen resignation, like mariners in the tops of gradually-sinking wrecks.

At last, however, our pioneers came to the end of even such roads as these, and had to trust to rare cattle-paths, the sun, the compass, and "gumption" for guidance. They had reached the march-land on which the white man, who has grown nearly as wild, meets the black man who has not been tamed, and shoots him or poisons him with strychnine-damper for spearing his flocks and herds, and sometimes gets speared by him in return. On the last run our pioneers crossed they met a stockman who was herding cattle with pistols in his holsters and a carbine in his hand. A strange wild-looking fellow was this stockman. He wore a rain-blackened, sun-bronzed, cabbage-tree hat, with a jetty, greasy cutty pipe stuck into the discoloured band ; a faded, stained, white-seamed red shirt, buckled round him with a chapped brown belt ; and tat-

tered moleskin trousers falling in vandyked fringes over rusty gaping boots. One of his stirrup-leathers was made of knotted green hide. His face was just the colour of his hat—the little of it that could be seen peeping through a foot or two of coarse black hair like a guardsman's bearskin. He had lived so long by himself that, when he first began to talk to the new-comers, he stammered like a bashful girl. He soon recovered his tongue, however, and the first thing he asked for was tobacco. They were smoking tea on that station, owing to the long time the drays that were bringing them fresh stores had been delayed upon the road. When Sydney gave the man a fig or two of colonial tobacco, and another of glossy Barrett's twist, he pounced upon them as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. The American negrohead he put away jealously in his trousers-pocket for special occasions, and then began to slice and rub up the dull-green saltpetery colonial tobacco, as if he

was famishing for want of a "proper smoke." As it spluttered in his pipe he told the strangers some strange tales about the blacks. They had sighted them several times before this; but, as the blacks had always bounded off like so many kangaroos as soon as they were sighted, our pioneers had begun to think that they would not have much to fear from them.

"Don't you believe it," said the stockman. "They'll be on ye when you're least lookin' for 'em, the sneaking divils!"

This is one of the stories he told about the blacks, and from it you will see that white men can be quite as bloodthirsty in those wild parts:

"When we come up here, two er the chaps that the cove hired was brothers. I niver seen brothers so fond er each other as them two young fellers was. Strappin' young fellers, though they was new to this kind er work. They'd been knockin' about, an' was glad to git anythin' to do, I guess. Wal, one day Tom—that was the

youngest—was down by the creek yonder, lookin' arter a duck, or summat er that. Me an' Fred—that was the eldest—was up on the rise beyont, lookin' arter the bullocks. All of a suddent we heerd a *cooey*.

“‘That’s Tom,’ says Fred. I didn’t want him to tell me. It worn’t a bit like a black feller’s.

“‘He’s come to grief,’ says I, for it sounded like that, an’ down we galloped to the creek full pelt. Jist as we got into the scrub we heard another *cooey*, an’ presently another, fainter an’ fainter like. Wal, we hunted about, an’ onder a grass tree we found poor Tom with a spear stickin’ into him.

“‘Mother—poor old gal!’ he says, when we come up to him, an’ Fred was kneelin’ by his side. I guess he was the old gal’s pet, and Fred had promised to look arter him when they come out, or summut er that. Anyhow Fred looked like a very devil.

“‘Which way?’ says he, lookin’ about an’

cockin' his gun. 'Who was it, Tom?' says he, with his face as white as ashes.

"Poor Tom had jist breath enough left to say 'Black Swan,' an' then the blood bubbled out er his mouth, an' he was dead, an' his brother a-blubberin' over him like a gal over her sweetheart. I let him blubber for a bit to ease hisself, but he was ser long about it that I gives him a nudge with my foot. 'Come,' says I, 'Fred, git up—that ain't no good,' says I.

"'No,' says he, jumpin' up, 'that *ain't* no good—but you hear me, Tom!' An' then he clinched his fist like the playactors, an' swore that, if he iver cotched Black Swan, he'd cut him in two with a cross-cut saw.

"'Sarve him right,' says I, 'but there ain't much chance er that.'

'Black Swan was a black devil we'd called so 'cos of his gallus long neck. Wal, we cotched Tom's horse, and Fred took the corpse back on it to the station, and buried his brother close

ahind our hut. I can't say I relished that azactly, nor the way Fred 'ud go an' sit by the grave arter sundown, mumblin' to hisself as if he was silly. He'd been a jolly chap afore that—not half as jolly as Tom, though. The hut was like a dead place when *he* was gone. All that Fred seemed to care about was to get a pop at the blacks. Wal, one day when we'd had a scrimmage with 'em, Fred hit Black Swan in the knee. He was a-hoppin' off, boohoooin' like a babby, a one leg, but Fred was down on him in no time. I 'spected he'd blow his brains out right off, an' have done wi' him. But Fred knocked him down with the butt-end er his gun, an' tied his hands an' feet, an' lugged him back to our hut, an' kicked him into the skillion ahind.

“‘What are you going to do with that poor devil, Fred?’ says I, when we was havin’ our smoke arter supper.

“‘Niver *you* mind,’ says he.

“Wal, it worn’t no business o’ mine, an’ so I

turned in. Next mornin' the black was gone, an' Fred didn't show. Then I guessed what was up, an' told the cove. Him and me rode down to the place where poor Tom was skewered, an' there, right afore the grass tree, was the black, lashed atween two planks, an' sliced through as neat as you'd cut a sangwidch. Fred niver showed arter that, an' I worn't sorry to be rid er his company, though, arter all, it were on'y a black feller."

Prince Chummy was far less affected by this horrid story than Harry and Donald were. There is not much love lost between black fellows of different tribes ; the tribes are not united by any feeling of common patriotism ; but native Australian lads have the same kind of liking for the blacks that a young squire has for his peasant foster-brother.

"The cowardly English cur!" cried Harry, indignantly. "If they'd fought fair with spears and womeras, the Englishman would precious soon have cut his lucky."

But before he left his brother's station, Harry had learnt to think somewhat more harshly of the blacks.

When Sydney's party had left that last run, and crossed a wide stretch of dry scrub country, they struck a creek shaded by red gum-trees, and ran it down until they came to what was, for Australia, a fine river. Fig trees and pines—all kinds of trees—laced together with creepers and wild vine, grew thick along the river's banks. They were pink and purple and crimson and yellow with wild flowers, and big white water-lilies with huge green leaves almost paved the water inshore. There were wild fowl, too, in the river; and scores upon scores of pigeons, bronze-wings, and green and purple wompoos, were feasting on the wild figs and cherries, and making them patter down like rain. Besides a host of little birds, there were snowy cockatoos and flashing parrots and lories galore, and sometimes a paddymelon was seen.

“Just won’t we blaze away, Donald!” cried Harry, in ecstasy.

But what pleased Sydney more was the grassy, light-timbered land, that stretched like a wild park for miles on both sides of the river. He determined to seek no farther, and as soon as he had pitched his camp, he was in the saddle again, and off to mark out his run. He scored the bark of a tree from which he started with his initials, and then rode a dozen miles or more, and slashed another tree with his tomahawk. In that free-and-easy fashion he took possession of all the land between the trees for ten miles on both sides of the river. Then he galloped into camp again, and scribbled off a rough description of the district he had taken up for the Crown Lands Office, using the dray for his writing-desk. With this specification Prince Chummy was sent back upon their tracks to the nearest post-office. It was by no means certain that Prince Chummy would return, although he did seem so fond of

his young master, since black fellows are very fickle; but he could best be spared from the station when hard work had to be done—that being an occupation not at all to a black fellow's taste. He might safely be trusted to post the letter, since Sydney had made him believe that it would come back to tell of him if he didn't.

Whilst he was away Sydney and Jim and Bob set to work at timber-felling and splitting, whilst Harry and Donald in turns mounted guard over the stores or looked after the cattle. Before Prince Chummy got back, a store had been run up, and a hut for Sydney and the boys, and another for the men, and the stockyard was nearly finished. Masters and men fared very much alike. In neither hut was there any superfluous furniture. The bedsteads were bullocks' hides stretched on posts driven into the ground. All this time not a black had been seen at Pigeon Park, as Sydney had christened his station. They came often enough afterwards, as you will read

in my next chapter ; but in this I have only room to tell how they first made their appearance there.

One evening the cattle and horses had been driven into a grassy horseshoe peninsula made by the winding river, not far from the huts. Sydney and the men had knocked off work, and were sitting, smoking, on their verandahs, and the boys were out with their guns. Presently Harry cried out,

“ Hark ! I can hear a horse galloping yonder. Perhaps it’s Chummy come back. Let’s go and meet him.”

When Donald put his ear down to the ground, he heard the hoofs quite plainly, and agreed to go. As a rule, young Australians think it is necessary to ride when they set out anywhither of set purpose. They will take the trouble of running a horse up from a flat almost a mile off in order to ride a mile. But if the boys had gone back then for their horses, the chances were that

the horseman, whoever it was, would get to the station almost as soon as they did ; so they trotted off on foot. In a few minutes the rider topped a rise, and though the setting sunlight bathed him in bright blood, they could make out that it was Chummy. He reined in as he drew near the boys in a place in which there was a belt of scrub on both sides. He was grinning, and shouting back greetings to his young friends, when from the scrub on both sides whizzed a flight of spears. Poor Chummy, bristled like a porcupine, fell forward on his horse's neck, clutching the mane with the rigid grasp of death, and the fear-maddened horse, which had been wounded in the neck itself, rushed past the boys like a whirlwind. Out of the scrub darted a score or two of darkies, dancing and jabbering, "Wah ! wah ! wah !" like angry apes, and advancing on the boys with brandished spears and wildly-waved boomerangs and waddies.

"I did feel funky then, and no mistake, Mr.

Howe," Harry afterwards told me; "but, you see, if we'd shown the white feather then, it would have been all up with us. So we turned round and stared at the blacks.

"‘We must pepper them,’ I said to Donald.

"‘Ay, lad; but ane at a time, and then load whilst the ither is firin,’ says Donald.

"He’s a cool customer, is Donald, with his *t’anes* and *t’ithers*. We hadn’t much time to talk, for I saw one of the beggars just going to let drive at us, so I up with my gun and let drive at him. I was loaded with duck-shot, and though it scattered, I must have spoilt his beauty, for the blood came streaming down his face. It was queer to see how scared the big beggars were—over six foot some of ‘em were. They couldn’t have been much used to powder. They all of them stopped short when they saw the blood, as if they’d *all* been shot.

"‘Don’t wait for me,’ I said to Donald, when I was going to load again; but, though he gave

'em both his barrels pretty quick when he saw how things were, he only marked 'em behind. They'd all turned, and before you could say 'Jack Robinson' they'd vanished in the scrub. Syd and the men weren't long in rushing up, I promise you; but there was nothing left for them to do. Poor old Chummy was as dead as a door-nail by that time. We buried him before we went to bed, with some of the spear-heads still sticking in him. We couldn't have got 'em out without tearing him all to bits. I suppose the beggars had got it into their heads that he'd brought us, and so wanted to finish him off first. It's strange the down black fellows have on black fellows. Poor old Chummy! And yet, after all, if you think of it, you can't blame the beggars. I can't see what right we whites have to this country. If you were to get up at night and see a fellow helping himself to your swag, you'd do your best, I guess, to shoot him if he wouldn't bundle out. And that's how the blacks must feel when they

see us taking up their country. It sounds soft, and yet I can't help half wishing sometimes that they were as 'cute and as plucky as the Maories. *They* won't stand nonsense, for all your English red-coats ; though the soldiers and settlers between them might eat up every Maori, if they could only catch 'em and kill 'em. There's enough of 'em to do it."

XI.

PIGEON PARK.

FTER that first brush, the blacks still for a time kept clear of the station buildings, but, now here, now there, they were always giving unpleasant proofs of their presence on the run. It was, in fact, the best bit of their hunting-ground, and therefore it is not astonishing that they considered the whites, instead of themselves, to be the trespassers. The black fellows speared the cattle and horses, and tried hard to kill the men and boys too. They had to look about them "with all their eyes" when they were riding past any cover.

Once Handsome Bob was missing for a couple of days. When he was found he was almost dead; for the blacks had knocked him off his horse with a boomerang, gashed him with their tomahawks, prodded at him with their spears till his flesh was like a perforated card, and then tied him to a tree which ants had connected with their hill by a little sunken path like a miniature railway-cutting. The ants and the flies had made an awful object of poor Bob's patchwork of wounds; and though he did at last most marvellously "recover," as it is called, he was half silly ever afterwards. Jawing Jim was kinder to him than you would have expected whilst he lay helpless in the hut, and Sydney and the boys, of course, looked in, and did what they could for him. But for hours he had to be left alone, with the chance that the blacks would swoop down upon him and finish their work. When he did get about again, although half silly in other things, he had a strange, fierce knack of surprising black fellows, and pot-

ting them from behind a tree as if they had been so many wild ducks.

Long before Handsome Bob was up again, his mates had been forced, as they thought, to be almost equally savage. Whenever they saw a black, they tried to kill him, as "naturally" as one tries to kill a snake or a wasp or any vermin. It is not pleasant to have to write about such things, but I must if I am to tell the whole truth about Australia. Sydney soon got quite envenomed against the blacks, whom he had robbed of their hunting-ground, because they were killing off his cattle; and not long afterwards Harry and Donald fully sympathized with him. Not one of the three felt the slightest scruple in shooting down a black, and then cutting off his head and hanging it *in terrorem* on a tree, as a gamekeeper nails a hawk against his gable. There is a terrible amount of the tiger in human nature. When blood has once been tasted, so to speak, in savage earnest, "civilization" peels off like nose-

skin in the tropics, and "Christian" men, and even boys, are ready—eager—to shed blood like water. They are *not* eager to talk about what they have done when they get back from the Bush amongst their mothers, sisters, wives, and sweethearts; but then, they think white mothers, &c., are so different from black gins and their offspring—and when the white women hear of what the black fellows have done or tried to do to their darlings, they are very apt to frame excuses for the white atrocities which they dimly guess at when they kneel beside their beds at night to give God thanks for their darlings' return to districts in which it is possible to go to a "real church" and "regular services" every Sunday. Jawing Jim wanted to "polish the blacks off" like dingoes, by setting baits of poisoned food about the run; but at poison Sydney drew the line, and the boys, who were half startled by the kindness with which they had taken to their killing work, could not help feeling relieved

at finding that the line was to be drawn anywhere.

"No, Jim," said Sydney. "Fighting's all fair. If we didn't shoot down the blacks when we came across 'em, they'd precious soon spear us. But it's sneaking to poison the beggars, when they haven't a chance of hitting back."

"Boot ye poiason the warrigals, Mester Sydney, an' ah kent see as there's mooch to choose atween the two soarts o' warmin."

"P'r'aps there isn't," answered Sydney. "But anyhow there's something of a man, so far as look goes, in a black fellow; and so we'll fight fair. I'll have no strychnine used—do you understand, Jim?"

"*Ah*oonerstaun'," growled Jim, "boot *thee* doosn't. Pooder or poiason—wha-at's the oadds?"

After a good many brushes in the scrub, the black fellows grew more used to fire-arms, and ventured down one night upon the station buildings. Fortunately it was moonlight, and Donald,

who chanced to be awake and looking out of the window, could plainly distinguish the invaders as they crept out of a patch of scrub about a couple of hundred yards off, and came crouching towards the huts with their noses almost touching the moonlit grass.

“Sydney! Harry!” he shouted, “here come the blacks!” and snatching up his gun, he deliberately levelled it, and let fly at the foremost black fellow.

When the blacks found that they were discovered, they sprang up erect, streaked and spotted with white and red clay, daubed on in stripes, and hideous faces, brandishing their spears, waving about their boomerangs and waddies, knocking their bark shields together, and advancing rapidly in a wild tramping dance to a horrible chorus of “Wah! wah! wah!”

But Donald’s shot had aroused all the white folk. Handsome Bob was strong enough to fire a gun then, and rushing to *his* window, he was

the first to follow suit to Donald. Five marks-men were soon popping away incessantly. A shower of missiles whizzed through the moonlit air, and hurtled against the slab sides and bark roofs of the huts ; but several of the blacks were down on the ground, and more had been slightly hit. Leaving their dead and badly wounded, the blacks turned and fled in disorder, and the five whites, who had defeated more than a hundred savages, sallied from their cover flushed with victory, and commenced an incautious pursuit. In their contempt for their enemy, they straggled from one another, and whilst they were thus giving chase, a tall black suddenly sprang from behind a tree, stunned Harry with a blow of his waddy, and carried him off.

When Harry came to himself, he was lying in a black fellows' encampment. It was broad daylight. The wounded warriors were crouching here and there, with earth instead of ointment stuffed into their wounds. The unhurt warriors,

for the twentieth time, were bragging about their prowess. The gins had already celebrated it in a song, which they sang as they dragged a water-hole for fish, with a mat rather than net of twisted grass, and as they squatted on the ground inside and outside the gunyahs—conical huts of bark and wild vine—that were scattered about and clustered together under the weeping acacias. Grey, glistening bark canoes were lazily rubbing their sides together on a large lagoon hard by. “Tamed” dingoes slouched at their masters’ heels, or snuffed about the gunyahs, gaunt as starved wolves. One woman was suckling alternately her own piccaninny and a puppy dingo! Two or three of the gins were guarding some opossums that were being cooked under a round layer of stones, on the top of which the kitchen fire was kindled. (Sometimes, instead of using this oven arrangement, the blacks bury their game, unskinned, in the hot ashes). The men had nothing on but a strip of kangaroo-skin

round their loins, but the women wore kangaroo and 'possum rugs.

When Harry came to himself, he ached all over, and felt so stiff, that, although he was not bound, he could not rise from the ground. He fell sometimes on his face, and sometimes on his back, when he attempted to get on his feet. Some black boys who were standing near jee ed at him when they saw this, and pricked him with their spears, at the same time mimicking his motions, like so many monkeys. But an old black, who was sitting with his back to the tree under which Harry was lying, left off nursing his knees for a minute, waved the young rascals off, and beckoned to a party of old gins to come near. These old ladies felt Harry all over, and when they found that no bones were broken, they took off his clothes, and began to dig their skinny black fists into him as if they were kneading bread. Then they dipped him in a water-hole, and, after he had lain down to dry, they trotted

him about till all his aches and pains were gone, and he was able to eat a hunch of baked 'possum with relish—strong as it did taste of peppermint—even although he could not help seeing that he was being attended to in this careful way simply that he might give his captors more sport afterwards, when they began to torture him. But one of the old women who had kneaded Harry had noticed a mole on his back which was very much like one that a dead son of hers had on *his* back, and so the old woman had come to the conclusion that her dead son had "jumped up white-fellow," as the blacks phrase it, in Harry. The other members of the tribe opposed this view, and there was a hot argument about it, in which, although it lasted for an hour, the name of the dead son was not once mentioned—the Australian blacks carefully abstaining from *naming* their dead. At the end of this controversy Harry was placed on a little mound, and a shield was given him; three of the adroitest spear-

throwers being stationed at some distance opposite to him. The first threw, aiming at Harry's stomach, but Harry, more by good luck than good management, caught the spear in the shield.

“It is the son of Kaludie,” shouted the old gin who claimed him as her son.

“Kaludie is blind,” shouted the others: “the son of Kaludie, when he played with the spears, waved like the wild vine; the white boy stands stiff as the tea-pole.”

The second thrower hurled his spear, and that, too, quivered in the shield, instead of piercing the heart at which it had been hurled.

“It is the son of Kaludie,” shouted the old gin again.

Harry's marvellous luck still continued. He caught the third spear also, which was aimed at his head.

“It is the son of Kaludie,” for the third time shouted the old gin, running to throw her arms

around Harry, and at the same time gashing her cheeks with a stone.

“ Kaludie has eyes,” shouted the others, at last convinced. “ The white fellow is slow as a koala, but this white boy is quick as a wink.”

After this, although he was strictly watched, a great deal was made of Harry. He was taken hunting and fishing with the tribe, and was helped more plentifully than the other boys to the wallaby, snake, parrot, iguana, yam, figs, honey, grubs, or whatever else happened to be going for food. This made the black lads jealous of him, and one of them asked, “ Was not the son of Kaludie a kipper ?” and then pointed to Harry’s mouth, out of which, of course, no tooth had been knocked, black-fellow fashion, at the “ kipper ” age. This discovery brought on another long argument, and it was at last decided that the son of Kaludie must be made a kipper over again next full moon. Accordingly poor Harry was obliged to submit to have a front tooth knocked out. That was

rather unpleasant ; but if Donald had been with him, he would have enjoyed the hunting and fishing. He learnt to hurl the spear and fling the boomerang almost like a black fellow. But just as he was getting a little reconciled to his captivity in the open air, something occurred which made him long more than ever to get back to his own people. In a fight with another tribe, several of his captors were slain. The corpses were brought back and roasted, peeled like potatoes, and eaten by their own comrades. When the bones had been picked, they were put into baskets of native grass, sent about to be howled over, then brought back to their families' gunyahs to be kept for a time *in memoriam*, and at last hung on the branches or dropped into the hollows of trees, on which the emblem of the tribe, a waratah, was carved. A plump arm was thrust into Harry's hands, as a special treat. When he flung it down, and rushed away from the horrid banquet, even Kaludie became half sceptical as

to whether he could indeed be her son. For days afterwards he could not touch flesh food of any kind, and the natives' suspicions might have been seriously aroused, had not their attention been diverted from him by a mysterious illness which struck down young and old in their camp. In vain were dead men's skins brought out for the invalids to be laid on. In vain did adventurous warriors waylay the members of other tribes, in order to secure their kidneys to make ointment for the sufferers. In vain did the old gins rinse their mouths and spit beside the sick, invoking curses on the sorcerer who had caused them to writhe in agony. It was manifest, the blacks said, that the sorcerer came and went as he pleased, underground, to the camp, and that he must be slain before its peace could be restored. Handsome Bob was the sorcerer credited with its calamity.

One day a boasting young black bounded into

the camp, and, striking an attitude, began to chant (of course in black fellow's lingo) :

“I have slain—whom have I slain? Is it the white wizard that burrowed like the wombat? Is it he whom we caught and fastened to the tree? Is it the white wizard with the face like the flying fox? Yes, it is the white wizard that lies slain under the wattle—slain by the spear of me, the brave Jooragong.”

Then the excited gins took up the song—

“Jooragong is young, but he has slain him who slew the blacks—the white wizard who burrowed like the wombat—the white wizard with the face like the flying fox. Jooragong is young, but he is braver than the old men. We will all be the gins of Jooragong.”

And then there would have been a great corroborree, had not a sceptical old warrior said,

“Jooragong is brave in his own mouth. Why did Jooragong leave the scalp of the white wizard under the wattle? Let us go and look on

the face of the flying fox. Let us be sure that the white wizard will no more burrow like the wombat."

Jooragong looked very much like a trapped dingo, but he could not refuse the old man's challenge. A party of the blacks started under his guidance to make sure of the death of the white wizard, and the son of Kaludie went with them. At last Jooragong stopped and said,

"The white wizard lies dead under *that* tree," pointing to one in the distance; but when they came to the tree, there was no corpse there. "He is gone—he is a wizard," said Jooragong.

"Let Jooragong show me the white wizard's tracks," answered the old warrior.

"He burrows like the wombat," said Jooragong.

"Then Jooragong, who is young, but braver than the old men, has not speared the wombat," sneered the old man. "We will go back, and

the gins shall sing of Jooragong—‘ Jooragong is young. Jooragong is brave. His enemies are dried up before him like water. We look for the enemies whom he hath speared, but we find them not. When dead they still fear Jooragong, who is braver than the old men.’ ”

The son of Kaludie, however, did not go back to camp. Jooragong had led the party of searchers within sight of the station buildings, and Harry determined to make a bolt for them, if he died for it. He found it easier work than he had expected to get away. The rest of the blacks were so busy jabbering jibes at Jooragong that Harry was not noticed when he lagged behind, and in a few minutes he was able to slip behind a tree, and thence make a slant for the station. When he had once ventured to begin to run, he kept on running as if he was racing Death. He tumbled to the ground dead-beat, but panting like a steam-engine just about to blow up, when he had almost reached the huts.

Donald ran out, and then looked half inclined to run away again.

“Harry,” he said, “are ye sure it’s yoursel’, of your wraith? Hech, man, ye’re a sicht for sair een,” Donald went on, with the tears gushing up into his own generally hard-looking grey eyes, like water oozing from a rock. “We thocht ye’d been deid, an’ buried inside the blacks this long while.”

After Harry’s escape the blacks again made very audacious descents on the station buildings. For one thing, they wanted to recapture the son of Kaludie; for another, they wanted to kill the white wizard, who, instead of having been speared by Jooragong, had made the braggart dodge from tree to tree before his gun. For a third thing the black fellows had a great relish for the white fellows’ stores, to which every now and then they found a scrambling chance of helping themselves. More fighting took place, and every now and then a black was shot. Still the blacks came down

upon the homestead. As it was impossible to guess when they would come, the place could not be efficiently guarded unless the whole of the little garrison always stayed at home—and in that case how was the work of the station to be done?

“Ah tell thee whet ‘t is, Mester Sydney,” said Jawing Jim (who up in the bush had almost begun to merit his *sobriquet*) ; “if tha wan’t poiason the warmin, tha moost skeer ‘em. Me an’ Boab ‘ll do it for thee. Boab ain’t mooch fit for nawthing else nowa, poor lahd !”

This was the stratagem the men contrived : They cut off the head of a dead black fellow, and put it into a full flour-cask, the top of which was left open. Then leaving the store door unlocked, and the flour-cask just behind it, all the pioneers left the buildings ; the boys, however, returning by a roundabout route, and “planting” in some scrub not far off to witness what might happen. They had to wait some time, but at last the

blacks made their appearance. Even their keen eyes detecting no trace of the presence of any whites, they soon swarmed up boldly to the store. Jooragong, bravest of the brave when there was nothing to be feared, rolled out the cask that stood so conveniently near and open, and began to scoop out the flour with both hands. But presently they brought up his countryman's head. The other blacks raised a wild howl and fled, but Jooragong stood stock-still, gaping, with eyes starting from his head, at his hideous handful. The firing of the boys' guns broke the spell. Off Jooragong bounded also, dropping the floury head out of his floury hands back into the cask; and so long as Harry and Donald stayed at Pigeon Park, the blacks never again ventured within gunshot of the store.



"THE BLACKS RAISED A WILD HOWL AND FLED."—*Page 212.*

XII.

A GOLD RUSH.

SOON after Harry and Donald returned to Wonga-Wonga, the station was excited by the news that gold had been found about seventy miles to the north of Jerry's Town. At first the news was partially pooh-poohed at Wonga-Wonga.

“We've heard of *storekeepers' rushes* before now, haven't we?” Mr. Lawson said to the men, who were getting unsettled by the tidings. “Those fellows would make out that there was gold in the moon, if people could get there to buy their damaged goods; and nicely they'd clap it on for carriage.”

It soon became certain, however, that something more than the mere "colour of gold" had been found at Jim Crow Creek. Three parts of the population of Jerry's Town started for the new diggings, and yet the town was busier than ever, such a stream of people poured through it. Nearly every township between Jerry's Town and Sydney contributed its quota, and amongst those who came from Sydney were a good many who had sailed thither from Melbourne. Perhaps they had been doing very well on the Victoria diggings, but diggers have almost always a belief that they could do better somewhere else than where they are; and so, when they hear of new diggings, off they flock to them, like starlings from England in autumn.

Wonga-Wonga and the other stations near Jerry's Plains soon became very short-handed. Shepherds and stockmen sloped wholesale for the Creek, sometimes helping themselves to their masters' horses to get there. To make the best

of a bad job, Mr. Lawson resolved to avail himself of the market for meat that had suddenly been created at Jim Crow Creek; and, accordingly, he and the boys started thither with some of the sheep and cattle that had been left with scarcely any one to look after them.

As they rode into Jerry's Town, they passed a mob of Chinamen, in baggy blue breeches, who were preparing to encamp by the roadside. Most of them still wore their tails, coiled up like snakes, or dangling down like eels. The Jerry's Town youngsters were pelting the Chinamen, and taking sly pulls at the dangling tails, whenever they got the chance, meanwhile shouting "Chow-chow!" and singing in chorus—

"Here he was, and there he goes,
Chinaman with the monkey nose."

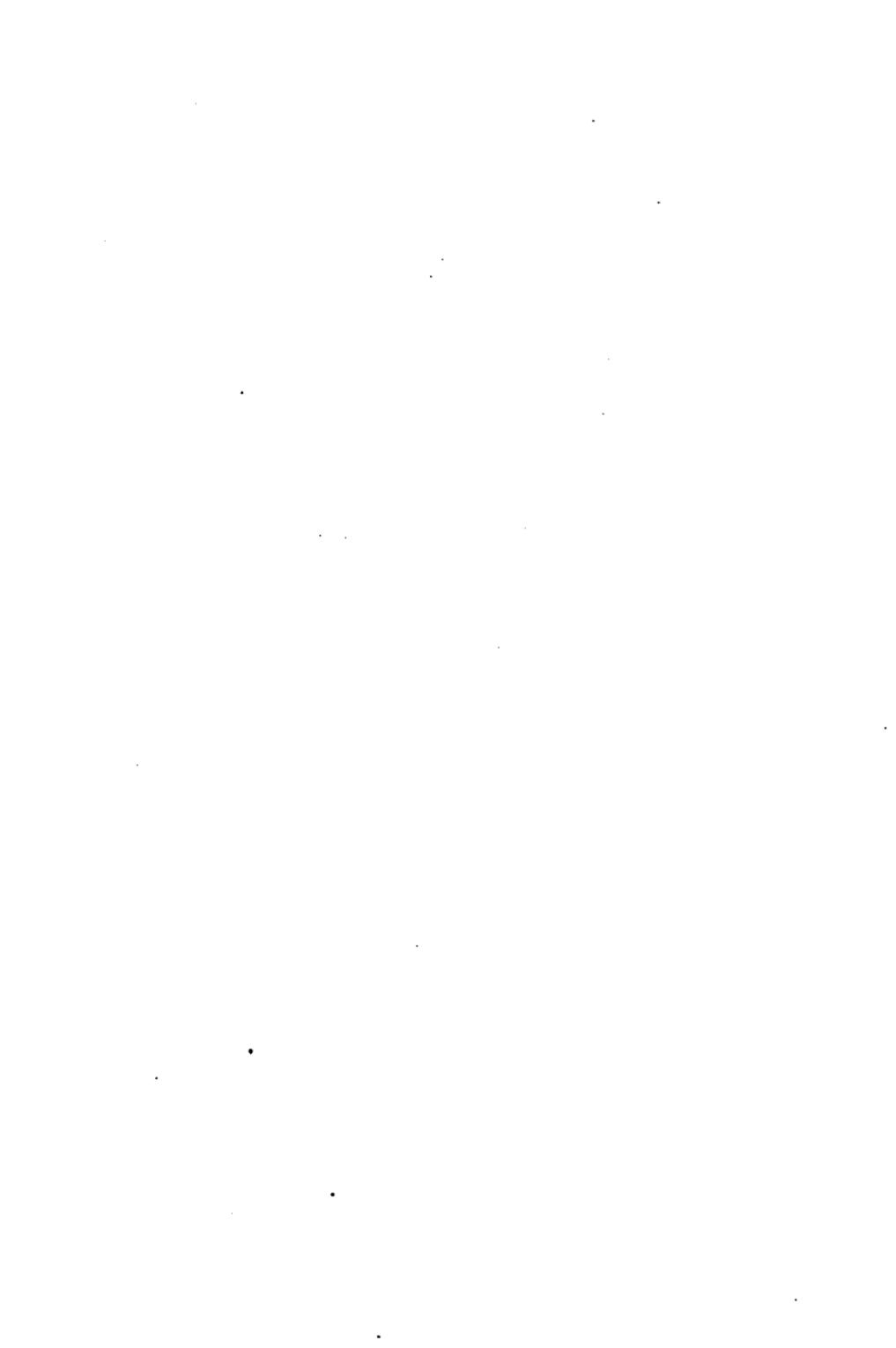
As the Chinamen laid down the bamboos they had carried on their shoulders, with bundles hanging from them like milk-pails from a yoke, and gathered sticks to boil their rice, their almond

eyes glanced very evilly from under their beehive hats at the young outside barbarians. I am sorry to say that is not only the *young* barbarians who behave very brutally to Chinamen in Australia.

All the way from Jerry's Town to Jim Crow Creek the road, that used to look even more solitary than Highgate Archway Road looks during the greater part of the year, was every here and there almost as crowded as Highgate Archway Road during the time of Barnet Fair. Men on horseback, with saddle-bags and pistols peeping from their holsters, were ambling and cantering along, singly and in couples, and in threes and fours. Moleskin-trousered pedestrians, who had "humped the swag," were toiling along, footsore and perspiring, their red or blue shirts rolled up and laid upon the top of their heavy loads. Greenhorn-looking young fellows, fresh from the counter or the desk, were sitting down, dead beat. Tarpaulined drays ground along in a long line, monotonously jingling the pots and

"MEN ON HORSEBACK, WITH SADDLE-BAGS AND PISTOLS." —Page 216.





pannikins slung beneath. Here and there a dray had broken down, and the driver was fussing about as angry as a wasp, or smoking in sulky idleness, because he could not get any one to stop to help him right his cargo. Every public was crammed with rowdy-looking, bronzed, bearded fellows, shouting for nobblers, spiders, and stone-fences. The free commons which every traveller in Australia used to look upon as a right rather than a favour, had ceased to be supplied by either house or hut. If any passenger wanted food or drink, he had to pay for them, and pay smartly too. Some of the parties taking their meals along the road were faring jollily, but some of the pedestrians who limped past them cast enviously hungry glances on their commissariat. To say nothing of brandy, bitter beer, sardines, and potted salmon, *they* were speculating anxiously as to how much longer they could make sure of tea and damper.

Jim Crow Creek was reached at last. A week

or two before, it had been so quiet that the shy water-moles would come up and bask for the half-hour together on the surface of its gravy-soup-coloured water. There was nothing to startle them except the sudden scream of a flock of parrots flashing across, or the lazy rustle of the long, inky, lanky-tassel-like leaves which the grey-boled trees upon the banks dipped into the smooth stream. But now for two or three miles upon both banks there was bustle. The trees had been cut down, the banks scarped and honeycombed, and dotted with big boil-like heaps of dusty earth. The tortured creek, here dammed, there almost drained, and yonder flowing in a new channel, seemed to be as puzzled as to its identity as the old lady who had her petticoats cut all round about. Steam sent up quick, angry white puffs; windlasses went round and round at the top of yawning wells of dirt; the grinding, rattling dash of shovels into soil, the ticking click of picks on stone resounded everywhere.

Cradles rocked ; hip-booted men, who looked as if they had not washed either face or hands for a twelvemonth, swished their precious mud round and round in washing-pans. Scattered along the sloping sides of the creek, and jostlingly jumbled on the flat it once crept round, so sleepily quiet, were all kinds of extemporized stores and dwellings : a house or two of corrugated iron ; more hastily knocked-up ones of slabs ; canvas-walled houses, roofed with asphalte-felt ; round tents, square tents, polygonal tents, and mere bark gunyahs. Some had their owners' names roughly painted on the canvas. Outside one tent hung a brass plate inscribed with "Mr. So-and-So, Photographer." Keen-looking gold-buyers stood at the doors of their wooden "offices." A commissioner, swellish in gold lace, cantered superciliously through the bustling throngs. Policemen lounged about, striving to look unconscious of the "Joey!" which the miners found time to shout after them in scorn. Hanging about the sly grog-

shop tents, there were men who might have been thought to have more time for such amusement, since smoking and nobblerizing was all that they seemed to have to do; but these gentry appeared by no means eager to attract the attention of the police. The gold-buyers looked anxious when the rascals' furtively-ferocious eyes chanced to fall their way, and they were not the kind of man that a solitary digger would have liked to see peeping into his tent at night, or loitering before him in the bush. Everybody at Jim Crow Creek had guns or pistols of some kind, and took care to let his neighbours know that he was armed by firing off his weapons before he turned in, and then ostentatiously reloading them after the gun-powdery good night.

Before Mr. Lawson and the boys reached the "township," as the Jim Crow Flat was already called, their sheep and cattle were bought up by a butcher who was waiting on the road. They bought their chops of him for their evening meal,

and when they found what he charged for them, Mr. Lawson was not quite so satisfied with his cattle bargain as he had been when he made it. After tea, the boys strolled out to look about them, and presently came to a large tent, with the American colours flying above it. There was a crowd at the entrance, and it was as much as two money-takers could do to make sure that they did take the admission-money from all the boisterous fellows who were rolling in. Amongst them were a few women, with faces like brown leather, who were still more boisterous.

“Let’s go in, Donald,” said Harry. “It must be those Ethiopian chaps that passed us on the road in the American waggon.”

The boys struggled in at last, and then wished, but in vain, that they could struggle out. They were jammed in a steaming, smoking, rum-scented mass of miners, good-tempered enough in the main, but apparently of opinion that the proper place for a man’s elbows was in his neighbour’s

ribs, and for his feet upon his neighbour's toes. Not more than half had seats, and sometimes they swayed about so, that it seemed certain the bulging tent must fall. They joined most discordantly in all the choruses, and when especially pleased, pitched coppers, and sixpences, and shillings on the stage. They threw other things that were not so pleasant. One wag threw a potato, which hit Bones upon the nose just when he was propounding a conundrum to Tambourine ; and Mr. Bones, in spite of his fun, being a very irascible little serenader, leaped down amongst his audience, and made frantic efforts to get at his assailant. There was very nearly a battle-royal between house and performers, and Mr. Bones was pulled up at last by his brethren, with his woolly wig half off his head, his long-tailed coat split from waist to collar, and his huge shirt-collar and cravat in a sadly crumpled condition. Whilst the scrimmage lasted, Donald had noticed a broad-shouldered mulatto, in red shirt and ear-

rings, who had kept on plunging backwards and forwards in the crowd, apparently bent on increasing the confusion.

“Hae ye got anything in your pockets, Harry?” said Donald, when comparative calm had been restored. “Just spot yon body in the red shirt. He tried my pockets more than once. I suppose he thocht I’d bring a bundle of notes in here. I’m nae sae daft.”

It was nearly midnight when the “entertainment” concluded, and it was Sunday morning before all the entertained got into the open air again. As the reeking crowd struggled out, the mulatto recommenced his plunging manœuvres. When the boys got out, they saw him hurrying in the moonlight down an alley between two little rows of tents.

“He’s a nice young man for a small music party,” said Harry, looking after him; “and there seems to be plenty of his sort. Come along, Donald; we’ve a good step to go, and I should

feel so spoony if I got bailed up by those fellows; though it isn't much, is it, they could ease us of?"

Mr. Lawson had pitched his tent on the other side of the "township," some little way down the Jerry's Town road, in a place where there were no other tents near.

When the boys had crossed the flat, and were ascending the steep rough bush track dignified with the name of Jerry's Town Road, they were not exactly pleased to see a man who looked very much like the mulatto; and two other men, slip out of the bush, and seat themselves on a log and a stump by the roadside.

"It don't seem game to turn out of the road for those fellows, does it, Donald?" said Harry. "But I'll go bail they're up to no good, and they're hulking big beggars, and I'll be bound they've barkers, and we haven't."

"I dinna think they're planting for us," answered Donald; "but, as like as not, they'd gie us a knock on the head if we went up to them;

an' what's the use o' gettin' a knock on the head for nae guid, if ye can avoid it?"

"I should uncommonly like to know what they're scheming," said Harry, as the boys turned aside into the bush. "They're jabbering fast enough about something. Let's creep up behind and listen. P'raps it's the governor they've a down on."

This is what the boys heard when they had crept like cats to a listening-place:

"It's a squatter fellow that sold some bullocks to Wilcox the butcher," said one of the mulatto's companions. "He's camped out yonder by himself."

"Well, but," objected the mulatto, "Wilcox would pay him in orders, and what's the good of them?"

"Ah, but I heard him ask Wilcox for some in cash or notes, if he had it. The fellow said he'd got cleaned out on the road up, and must have some money to take him back. So Wilcox gave

him some ; I can't say how much it was, but any's worth finding. Besides, he's a gold ticker —a real handsome one, as big as a frying-pan. And then there's the three horses, and first-chop colonial saddles."

"Is there anybody with him, then ?"

"Two young 'uns came with him, but they've gone down into the town, an' if they've come back, it don't matter much. I fancy he's turned in now. I've been watching him this good while, till I come down to hunt up you and Bill."

"Well, let's be off then," said the mulatto ; and the three began to run. The boys tried to make a short cut for the tent, but lost ground instead. When they reached the tent Mr. Lawson was on his back, half-throttling, however, the mulatto who knelt upon him, whilst the other two scoundrels were giving him savage blows and kicks.

"Put—a—ball—in—to—him," gasped the mulatto.

Before a pistol could be pointed, however, the two boys had leaped on the two men, and by the suddenness of the onslaught toppled them over, tumbling at the same time themselves. For a minute a confused heap of trunks and limbs heaved and wriggled on the floor; but Mr. Lawson rolled himself out, and, getting uppermost in turn, brought down his huge Northumbrian fist with a tremendous thud upon the mulatto's face. As soon as the other two men could scramble to their feet, they took to their heels. The boys had got hold of their pistols by that time, and Mr. Lawson was reaching out his hand for his revolver. Three bullets whistled after the two runaways, but neither was hit. Meantime the mulatto, save for his stertorous breathing, lay like a log upon the ground.

"Get your horse, Harry, and ride in for the police," said Mr. Lawson. "We'd best tie the scoundrel first, though."

Harry and Donald went to catch the hobbled

horse; Mr. Lawson turned to refasten an up-pulled tent-peg, and to get a cord, and when he turned round again, the mulatto was gone.

“The rascal was only shamming,” said Mr. Lawson, feeling rather silly, when the boys returned. “I turned my back for a second, and he wriggled off like a snake. Now, boys, turn in, and I’ll keep watch till the sun comes up. If I hadn’t been in such a hurry to get a snooze, I shouldn’t have been laid on my back by those mean curs. I must have been sleeping like a top when they pounced in upon me. I’ve to thank you, boys, and let us all thank God.”

Mr. Lawson and the boys stayed over the Sunday at Jim Crow Creek, but it was a strange Sunday. The miners knocked off work, but they economized the Sabbath hours in fighting out the week’s quarrels, which they could not spare time to settle on week-days. The only “service” was one conducted by a tall, gauntly-sinewy Cornish miner, who shouted at the top of his

voice, and worked himself into a pale perspiration as he flung about his long limbs as if they were galvanized. A few of his hearers looked pleased to be reminded anyhow of what the day was. A few more looked ashamed *because* they were ashamed to look pleased too. But most grinned, and then passed on to find more exciting amusements.

"Faix, it's the crathur's way o' divartin' himself," said the police-sergeant, who had stopped for a few minutes to hear his own creed anathematized ; "and a mighty queer kind o' diversion it is, to my thinkin'."

The sergeant, when spoken to about the attempted robbery, instantly recognized the mulatto.

"It's that thief o' the worruld, Baltimor-r-e Ben. That's who it is entirely. They call him Baltimor-r-e Ben becase he came from Mel-bour-r-ne. He'll lie dar-ruk for a bit asthur this, but we'll have him, sir-r; an' if we won't, the

digger bhoys will string him up if they catch him. An' was it the young gintlemen settled the other bla'guards? More power to their elbows! You should have kicked him on the shins, sir-r. A neegur's head's as harrud to crack as an Irishman's."

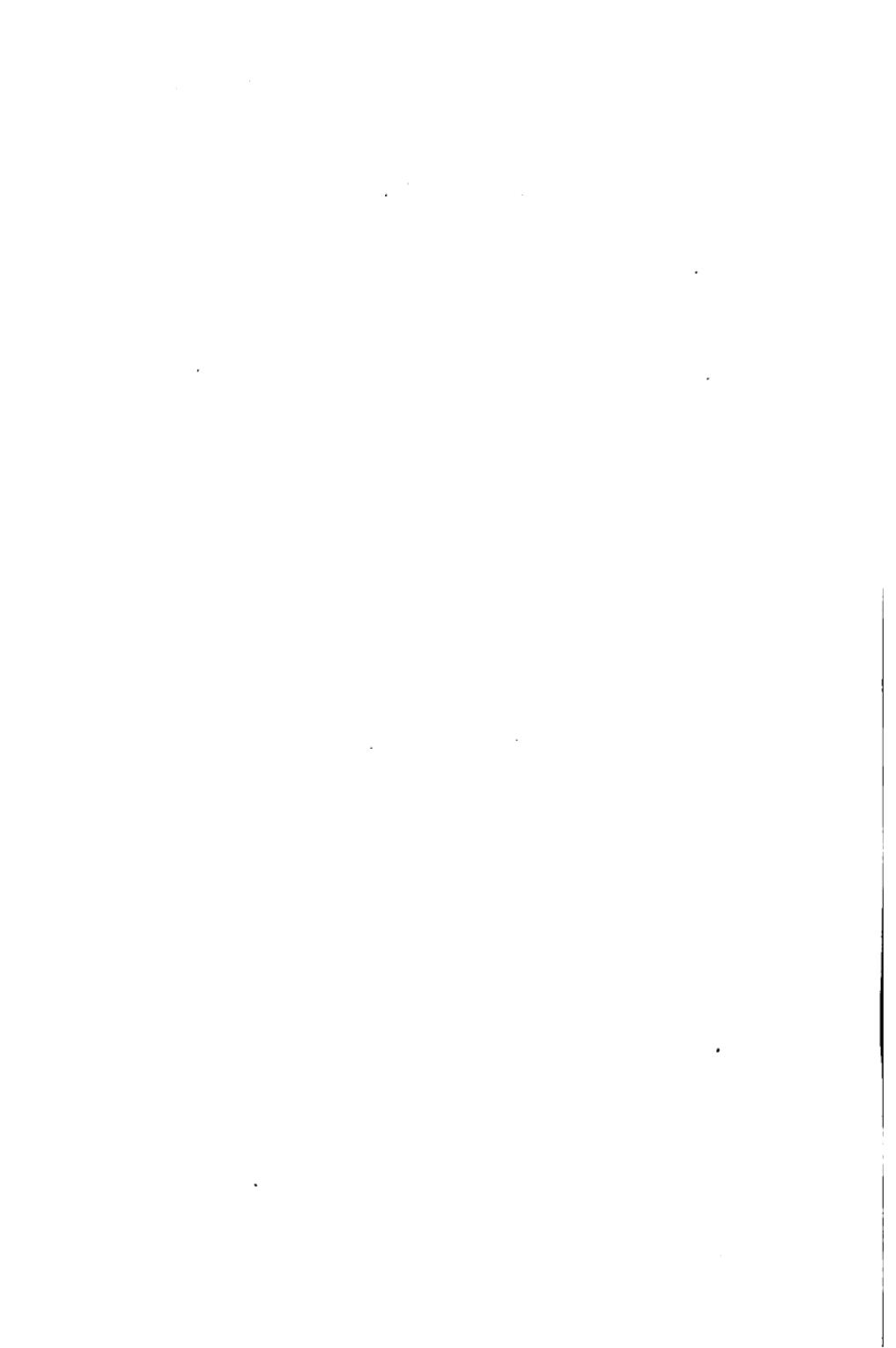
At Wonga-Wonga, as well as by the Jim Crow Creek police-sergeant, Harry and Donald were considered great heroes, when their exploits were told there. If Mrs. Lawson had had her way, however, neither her husband nor the boys would ever have gone to Jim Crow Creek again. Once more, nevertheless, they drove stock over thither. And then, suddenly, the place was deserted by all except a few Chinese fossickers, who mysteriously made a living out of claims which Europeans had thrown up as not worth a speck. The tide of diggers rolled back to Sydney, cursing the storekeepers as they went. Some waves of the tide crept rather than rolled, and some of the tide never got back. There was

misery, sickness, starvation, at Jim Crow Creek and along the road ; but sundry storekeepers had balanced their ledgers greatly to their satisfaction.

“Those miners ought to be ‘cute enough by this time to take care of themselves,’ said Harry, when he was talking over the matter ; ‘but still it does seem an infested shame that they should be done so. I wish Hargreaves had never come back from California. I don’t see what gold has done for the colony, except spoilt the runs and run up shepherds’ wages.’”

“Ah, that is how you Boys in the Bush talk,” said Miss Smith, who had recently returned from Sydney.

“Miss Smith,” replied Harry, majestically, “I no longer consider myself a *Boy* in the Bush.”



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